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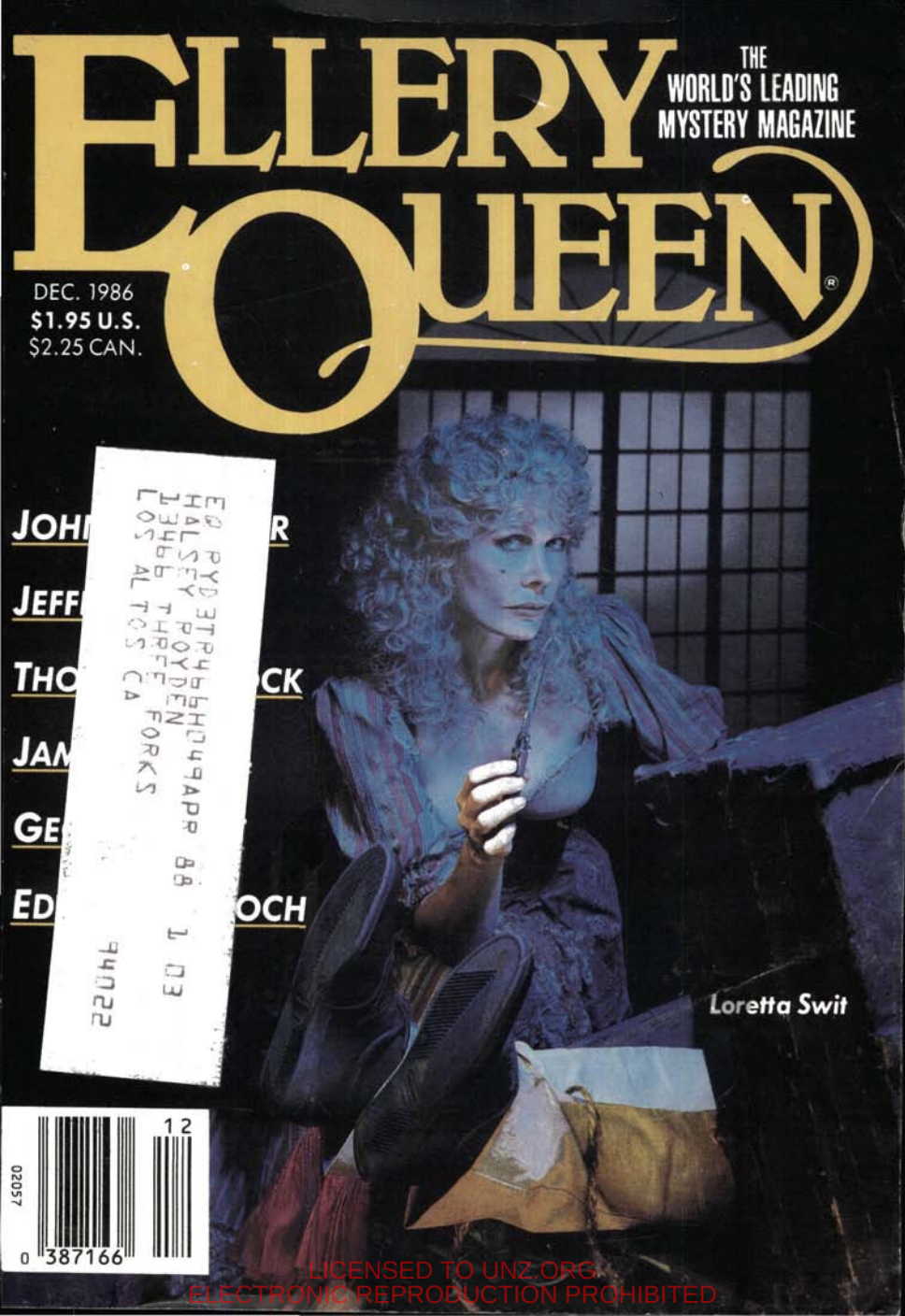

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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN ®

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a *NEW* Maynard Bullock story by

JAMES POWELL

The Amazing Gladys snapped off the crystal ball and said brightly, "Time to split. Just remembered I've got to make a house call."

"Hey, what about my future?" protested Bullock as he was hustled back out onto the pavement.

"You'll soon be main attraction at a big dinner, okay?" the fortuneteller said and slammed the door in his face.

Here's another fine mess Inspector LaPierre has gotten Maynard Bullock into . . .

THE CANNIBAL GOURMET

by JAMES POWELL

The stuffed animal head on the wall is a time-honored insignia of rank in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The commissioner works beneath a bison head, assistant commissioners beneath a moose, superintendents beneath an elk, and inspectors beneath a pronkhorn antelope. The tradition has only two drawbacks. First, when an assistant commissioner operating undercover enters a room with a stuffed moose head, he will instinctively go and sit beneath it. And the smarter criminals have come to watch for this. Second, when the antelope made the endangered-species list, the Force had to make do with cast-iron horns mounted on oak shields.

Peter LaPierre, Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock's immediate supervisor, had been among the first of these "hatrack inspectors" as they came to be called. Bullock suspected that this single fact lay at the root of the man's vile temper. So a summons from LaPierre usually made him sad, for he knew he was going to hear language

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of the sort one Mountie should never use when addressing another. But today when he got the word, he smiled to himself, finished cleaning the tulip pollen from his boots with a chamois cloth, closed his locker door, and set off with a light step.

Bullock mused on how quickly things could turn themselves around. Last week he'd been so down in the dumps he'd taken a long wet walk, trying to figure a way to get his career back on the tracks. He'd never have hinted it to good old Mavis, who still thought she'd hitched her wagon to a star, but guarding the flowerbeds on Parliament Hill was clearly a dead end. So Bullock walked and pondered, hands deep in his raincoat pockets, the bowl of his pipe turned upside down against the weather.

After an hour, Bullock found himself in a part of Ottawa he didn't know. Beneath the overhanging roof of an out-of-business gas station stood a dented and dusty van with a sign that said, *The Amazing Gladys Reads Your Future in Your Palm.* Studying a turf sheet at the open door sat a grey, slack-faced woman who tried for a gypsy air with a fringed red shawl across her narrow shoulders. By godfrey, it had to be fate, coming upon the Amazing Gladys at this particular moment in his life. Bullock knocked the ash out of his pipe and approached. He asked and was gratified to learn that, yes, she did give the Mountie discount on presentation of identification.

Bullock followed the woman into the gloomy interior of the van and sat down across from her at a small table. The Amazing Gladys snapped on the light inside her crystal ball and picked it up, using it like a flashlight to read his outstretched palm. Bullock was secretly ashamed of his hands, which so much flowerbed duty had made soft and plump. But the woman was impressed, poking at his palm and the meaty base of his thumb and purring appreciatively. With calipers from a drawer in the table, she measured width and thickness in several places, jotting numbers in the margin of her turf sheet. The result seemed to please her. Then she snapped off the crystal ball and said brightly, "Time to split. Just remembered I've got to make a house call."

"Hey, what about my future?" protested Bullock as he was hustled back out onto the wet pavement.

"You'll soon be main attraction at a big dinner, okay?" said the Amazing Gladys and slammed the door in his face. A moment later the van roared away.

Bullock frowned after it indignantly. Was that it? Was that all she saw in his future? But then it came to him!

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Grinning from ear to ear, he strode off down the street. Of course, what else could her prediction mean? Annually, every Mountie voted secretly for the MVM, the Most Valuable Mountie of the Year, the one who had best epitomized the spirit of the Force in the preceding twelve months. It had always been Bullock's dream to be so honored by his peers. One desperate year he'd even voted for himself. In the months that followed, he'd lived with the fear that he might actually win, for then he would have to stand up at the award dinner and confess what he'd done. But now he'd won the MVM and he'd done it fair and square!

While Bullock was enjoying this prospect, he caught up with the van parked beside a telephone booth. Inside, the Amazing Gladys was talking with animation into the receiver—to one of her friends in the business, Bullock had no doubt. He bet his palm was one for the record book. His mind's eye read a *Fortunetellers Gazette* headline:

AWARD WINNER'S PALM
EARNS KUDOS, TOO

Smiling, he had walked on with the same light step that now brought him to Inspector LaPierre's office.

But the summons was not about the MVM award. Bullock sensed at once that LaPierre's black mood involved the man with the ginger beard sitting behind the Inspector's desk busily tying a sheepshank in a stout piece of cord on the desk blotter. The stranger wore a scrimshaw pinkie ring, a thick grey turtleneck sweater, and a blazer with anchors on the buttons.

Then Bullock saw the yachting cap hanging from one of LaPierre's cast-iron antelope horns. The daring of the thing quite took his breath away. Just in time, he saw LaPierre's pitiless gaze zeroed in on his lips. The hint of a grin and he knew he'd end his Mountie career cleaning out stables for the boys in the musical ride.

"Bullock," said Inspector LaPierre as calmly as anyone can speak through clenched teeth, "this is Commander Nelson Drake of Naval Intelligence. Consider yourself on loan."

Without looking up, Drake said, "Toddle off and get us coffee, there's a good fellow, LaPierre." When the door closed, Drake executed a reef knot. Then he turned a pair of eyes on Bullock that were a shade of blue no visitor to Lake Louise will ever forget. "Ever heard of a South Pacific island group called the Macaroons?"

"You have me there, Commander," admitted Bullock.

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"Here's the thing then," said Drake. "In a few days, King Theodore of the Macaroons arrives in town. My people will be security on the Embassy grounds. Their ambassador suggested one of you people might add a bit of dash and color on the inside. In fact, he mentioned you by name. Any idea how come?"

Bullock shrugged. "On Parliament Hill I stand ever ready to add to a visitor's flower lore, be he ambassador or lowly tourist."

Through this, Drake struggled to tie a bowline. His Boy Scout days prompted Bullock to say, "The rabbit comes out the hole, Commander. He goes around the tree. Then he sees the fox so he pops back down the hole. Now you take the top of the tree and the rabbit's tail and you pull."

Repeating Bullock's scenario to himself, Drake tried again and succeeded. The waters of Lake Louise regarded Bullock more respectfully now. The man leaned forward and his tone was confidential. "Mate," he said, "the Macaroons would be a perfect location for a Canadian naval base."

"Ah," said Bullock.

"Oh, you can bet other countries are sniffing around, too," said Drake. "That's why Canada wants to put on the dog for King Theodore. That means you go in there and make yourself agreeable to these people, understand?"

Bullock cleared his throat uneasily. "Pardon my asking, Commander, but why does Canada want a South Pacific naval base? It's not like we had possessions there."

"That'd be foolhardy with no naval base to protect them," smiled Drake. He allowed that to sink in before asking earnestly, "Was Sir Wilfrid Laurier whistling Dixie when he declared that the Twentieth Century belongs to Canada?"

"By godfrey, no," insisted Bullock. Every schoolboy and Mountie in the land believed those prophetic words spoken by Canada's turn-of-the-century Prime Minister.

"Then that," Drake explained, "leaves us only fourteen years to take possession of what is rightfully ours. The Macaroons naval base will be Step One."

The Embassy of the Macaroon Islands stood in a pleasant residential neighborhood behind high iron gates at the top of a circular driveway. Bowing Bullock inside, the slender brown-skinned butler took the Mountie's suitcase and set it down by the cage of the elevator in the front hall. Then he bent over and touched his palms to the

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floor in what Bullock took to be another salutation. But then the man raised his heels in the air and, walking on his hands, started down the hall with a stately gait. "Please walk this way, sir," he said. But Bullock pretended he hadn't heard and followed in the normal pedestrian way.

The butler led him to a door, balanced himself on one hand to knock, and then ushered Bullock into the Ambassador's study. A small, lean, dark-skinned man with white teeth, a close-cropped moustache, and genial eyes rose from behind a large desk. He wore ambassadorial cutaway and striped trousers. "Damned nice of you to come on such short notice, Acting Sergeant," he smiled.

Here Bullock recited the little speech he'd put together about friendship between Canada and the Macaroons and the importance his nation placed on King Theodore's safety.

The Ambassador listened dutifully to the very end. Then he said, "With you here, Acting Sergeant, we will certainly all sleep secure, knowing no assassin or bomb-carrying anarchist can slip into the Embassy to await the King's arrival. But if you don't mind, I'd also like to take these few days before the Royal party comes to tell you of my people and our ways, a subject about which Western civilization remains, alas, quite ignorant."

"I'll be all ears, Mr. Ambassador," said Bullock.

"Good," smiled the Ambassador. "First off, you should know that my people hold hospitality to be the highest virtue. So please sit down and let me offer you a drink before dinner." He crossed to a cabinet which folded out into a small bar. "I'll bet you're an ale man."

When Bullock admitted he was, the Ambassador provided him with a bottle and a frosted glass from the bar refrigerator. Then he poured himself a sherry and raised his glass. "A pressing of grapes and a brew of malt and hops. Not bad for vegetarian goods."

Good godfrey, thought Bullock. Had he fallen among vegetarians? Was dinner to be Hubbard squash? Out loud he said, "I'm from the old meat-and-potatoes school myself, Mr. Ambassador."

"Among my people, only the King and his immediate household are carnivorous," said the Ambassador. "In the time of the Ancient Ways, as we call them, our frugal practices led us to look on those who fell in battle as the fruits of victory to be eaten by the winning side. Technically, I suppose we were cannibals, though this was only a small part of a much richer culture. Then about a thousand years ago a kind of meat frenzy seized our people and they turned from

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working in the fields and harvesting the sea to bringing home the bacon by waging war.

"Finally, to prevent our own destruction, the wise men from all the islands gathered and decreed that we could no longer eat human flesh. To enforce this law, they made the bravest of the warrior chieftains king of all the islands. But in remembrance of the Ancient Ways which were still dear to us, it was decided that the King and his household would be allowed to eat human flesh."

As he listened, Bullock noticed a dark face with a bulbous nose staring in at him through the French doors behind the Ambassador's chair. Bullock could only recall seeing a calculating expression like that once before. On their honeymoon he'd taken Mavis to the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto. That was the way the "Guess-Your-Weight" man on the midway had looked.

Bullock blinked and the face vanished, leaving nothing behind but bobbing bushes. "Our first kings were temperate men," continued the Ambassador. "They tried to make do with castaway sailors. But seafaring men have always made our royal line bilious. So they turned to criminals convicted of capital offenses and occasionally, when a subject became more fat and prosperous than the rest, the king would eat him and distribute his goods among all the people."

"Are we talking some kind of Communism here, Mr. Ambassador?" asked Bullock warily.

"Hardly," chuckled his host. "But the practice did have this one interesting result—we never accumulated those vast fortunes necessary for industrialization, for the construction of rail systems, for rural electrification. So our islands have remained a South Sea paradise. At the same time, sharing with our less fortunate neighbors became a way of life with us."

A servant standing on his hands appeared in the doorway. "Chewi-chewi, bigfella," he said.

The Ambassador rose. "Dinner's ready," he said. Placing his palms on the floor, he accompanied Bullock out into the hall, walking on his hands and chatting urbanely about the beauty of his homeland, of the Valley of Seventy-Three Rainbows, and of the Crystal Lagoon on whose waters it was said the pure-of-heart could walk.

Bullock's dinner loomed immense alongside the Ambassador's raw carrot sticks and tofu. A large bowl of turtle soup was followed by a slice of prime rib three fingers thick and hefty servings of mashed potatoes and lima beans. Dessert was a heroic slab of apple pie and

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a wedge of cheddar cheese almost as large. Whenever he turned to his glass to wash down the food, he found it filled to the frosty brim with ale. And whenever his eating faltered, his host would wag a scolding carrot stick. In the Macaroons, to leave anything on one's plate was the height of rudeness.

During the meal, the Ambassador continued with his people's story, telling how kings of the islands degenerated into a succession of cruel tyrants whose meat lust led them to eat any subject whose plumpness or livestock caught their eye. The people turned to vegetarianism and dieting. But even this did not always save them. Often a king would have twenty scrawny subjects roasted together at one crack just to eat their palms and the meaty part of the thumb, which, if wrapped in salamander skin to prevent overcooking, was considered a cannibal treat.

Looking down at his tofu, the Ambassador added, "And the wealth of the islands was squandered on royal schemes to develop subjects with big hands."

"How do you get big hands?" asked Bullock.

His host looked up. "I beg your pardon?"

"How do you get big hands?" repeated the Mountie.

"Practice!" laughed the Ambassador triumphantly. When Bullock looked perplexed, he explained, "That's quite a joke among my people. It's like your story about the man who asks another person how to get to Carnegie Hall and the other person says, 'Practice.' " He waited expectantly, ready to join with Bullock's laughter when it came. But it didn't and the Ambassador returned to his story.

"It was about this time that all of us who were not of the royal household started walking around on our hands to make them tough and inedible." Exhibiting his heavily calloused palms he added, "We know this was already our practice when your Shakespeare heard of us, for he writes of—

> 'The Cannibals that each other eat,
> The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
> Do grow beneath their shoulders.' "

"Your kings don't still eat people, do they?" demanded Bullock in his best policeman voice.

"My goodness," said the Ambassador with mock horror, "we'd never be welcomed into the family of nations if they did. However, we do still walk around on our hands when we are among our own. From this has come our deep interest in wild flowers, grasses, and insects, not to mention our scorn for greedy materialism or 'gimmi-

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gimmi,' as we call it. After all, when you walk around on your hands, all the money falls out of your pockets anyway."

After dinner the Ambassador took Bullock out to the front-hall elevator and personally escorted him up to his room on the third floor. There the fat-nosed man from the French windows was waiting for them with folded arms.

"This gentleman is the Royal Cook," said the Ambassador. "He's come ahead to prepare things for the King's arrival. You see, our King is something of a playboy, very proud of his table and wine cellar. But the cook is also the Royal Masseur. So I leave you in his hands. It's our custom to give guests a postprandial massage. It prevents fat buildup, distributing it with a marbling effect throughout the red meat." The Ambassador paused in the doorway and said, "You know, considering all the spiritual vices like arrogant pride or ruthless ambition kings are heir to, perhaps we're lucky that ours has chosen the sins of the flesh."

Bullock knew a massage wasn't something like a pedicure, a pompadour, or elevator shoes, which were explicitly forbidden by Mountie regulations. Nor was it like a facelift or a hair implant, which had to be aproved by a board of review. Still he hesitated.

"Tikki-tikki," said the cook, impatiently pointing to his wristwatch.

Not wanting to cast a shadow on the good impression he knew he was making, Bullock got undressed, stretched out on the bed, and allowed himself to be pummeled and kneaded. As a matter of fact, it wasn't all that hard to take. When the cook had gone, he felt so relaxed he slept for an hour. Then he got dressed and made a thorough check of the Embassy doors and windows. Good thing Commander Drake's people were on guard outside because the locks were definitely third-rate. Real takki-takki, thought Bullock and was delighted with how quickly he was picking up their language.

When he returned to his room, he found a large plate of cold-chicken sandwiches and two opened bottles of ale on ice. He ate a sandwich as he changed into his pajamas and drank an ale nightcap as he browsed through *Footloose in the Macaroons,* the sumptuous picture book on his bedside table. The section illustrating the little nation's orders and decorations interested him most, for he dreamed someday of appearing at dress parade with a cross on a ribbon around his neck or a star on his tunic.

Then the Ambassador came in to say goodnight. "I'd like to try

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out an idea on you, Maynard, if I may call you that," he said. "You see, on his last day with us we'll be throwing this big banquet for the King. All our embassies have sort of a competition going to see who can give the King the best meal. I've done pretty well in the past, thank heaven. If the King isn't pleased, you end up back in the Macaroons diving for the deadly porcupine stingray, whose quills we dye to make items for the tourist trade. Anyway, this year I thought I'd go ethnic and make everything Canadian. French Canadian pea soup, fiddleneck-fern salad from the Maritimes, a Lake Winnipeg goldeye for the fish course, and a maple-sugar mousse for dessert. What do you think?"

"You left out the entree," said Bullock.

The Ambassador looked away. "Let's just say it's what comes to mind first when people think of Canada."

In the eating department, that would have to be beaver, Bullock decided. He understood beaver-tail stew was something of a delicacy, though he'd never eaten it himself. "I guess this banquet'll just be for the staff and the royal party, eh?" he asked, trying to sound offhand.

"Of course you're invited, too, Maynard," said the Ambassador, giving him a tender-hearted look. He stayed, chatting and smiling encouragement, until Bullock had cleaned up the plate of sandwiches and drunk the second ale. "By the way," he said as he was leaving, "the King came to English late in life. When he says 'delicious,' he means 'delightful.' "

In what was to be the pattern of his next few days, Bullock was awakened by the arrival of the breakfast tray. He had scarcely worked his way through the pancakes, home fries, eggs over medium, pea-meal bacon, and triple order of toast when it was massage time again. After another lock check, Bullock stood about in the front hallway to greet each visitor with a smart salute or the fish eye as the case required. At eleven he was served cocoa and chelsea buns. At one he lunched heartily with the nibbling Ambassador and then had another massage. There was tea and chocolate cake at four and dinner at seven followed by his third massage of the day. Then in the evening came a substantial bedtime snack. By the morning of the King's arrival, Bullock had to suck in the old stomach to get into his uniform.

As he stood in the front hallway waiting for the royal cavalcade to bring the King from the airport, Bullock imagined a new section

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for the autobiography he expected to write someday. Chapter Seven: The Macaroon Years. "Although it is commonplace today to find Mounties occupying high positions of state for Canada at home and abroad, my appointment as Ambassador to the Macaroon Islands led the way and took the world by surprise. Yet those who knew me were aware of my warm friendship with King Theodore, based in no small part on my knowledge of his people and their ways and my mastery of the intricacies of Macaroonese."

Bullock's train of thought was interrupted when the butler threw the switch by the front door opening the gates, and two stretch limousines flying the red-and-white hound's-tooth flag of the Macaroon Islands turned up the driveway preceded by a motorcycle policeman.

The Royal Spitbearer led the way into the Embassy carrying the seven-foot rod of carved iron, symbol of the King's power of life and death over his subjects. The spitbearer, a scowling giant in a loincloth, was tattoed from head to toe with demons, dragons, serpents, arabesques, hatchwork, and rickrack designs intended to terrify. Yet Bullock noted a human touch as the man passed, for among the tattoos on his left forearm was the name "Lola" set in a heart pierced by an arrow.

The spitbearer was followed by his assistants, two lesser giants with folded arms. Then came the Ambassador, the cook, and after him eight of the royal wives. King Theodore himself brought up the end of the procession, his old face round and wrinkled as a withered apple. He wore an Italian suit of white silk and a panama hat. But his expression lost some of its geniality when he saw Bullock and smiled. His teeth were filed to a point. In fact, his mouth seemed to mirror his red-and-white hound's-tooth tie and hatband.

Bullock saluted smartly. The King and his wives stopped to look him up and down while the jabbering cook seemed to be pointing out aspects of the Mountie uniform and the salute for their inspection. The King and his wives smacked their lips, which Bullock knew from the Ambassador was his people's way of expressing approval. Then the plumpest of the wives reached out shyly and poked Bullock in the ribs, making him jump and fight back a giggle. (Mounties aren't supposed to be ticklish. Bullock had only passed the physical because the bored old doctor who administered the mandatory poke in the ribs hadn't caught him biting the insides of his cheeks.) More wives joined in the poking. Still at the salute, Bullock turned red in the face and snorted to fight back the giggles.

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"Ladies, ladies," scolded the King, "in English we do not do like that. In English we must do 'giddy-giddy-giddy.' " The King plunged ten wiggling fingers and thumbs into Bullock's midsection. "Giddy-giddy-giddy!" cried all the wives, joining in. What could Bullock do but throw his head back and whoop and holler, helpless with laughter? They tickled him until his sides and jaw ached. Then the King gave an order and they stopped. Patting Bullock on the forearm, he said, "Delicious, delicious." Then he and his party moved on.

For the next two days Bullock learned to keep his wits about him in the halls and grew adept at popping into closets at the approach of the King's wives. However, on the second night there was to be a dinner of state in the King's honor at Rideau Hall, following which Canada hoped to nail down the naval base. Bullock would have to be standing there at the salute, and vulnerable for the royal party's departure and return. He had to put on his thinking cap over that one.

Later that evening, as the royal party left for the dinner of state, Bullock gave them one of his snappiest salutes from inside the front-hall elevator with the grill closed. When the plumpest wife made a dart at him, he simply punched the button and ascended out of sight, saluting all the way. He'd hoped to repeat the performance, but when they returned from the dinner the mood had darkened and King Theodore wore a deep frown. Bullock went unnoticed saluting from behind the elevator grill.

Afterward, while making his last check of the locks for the night, Bullock was rattling the French doors in the Ambassador's study when commander Drake stepped out of the bushes. Pointing at himself, Drake mouthed "It's me" through the glass. Bullock quickly let him in.

"We've got problems, mate," whispered the naval officer. "Turkey's made King Theodore a better offer."

"Blast!" said Bullock. "How can Canada compete with Turkey in the sins-of-the-flesh department?"

"It gets worse," said Drake. "Apparently Kemal Ataturk said the Twentieth Century belongs to Turkey."

Bullock turned red. "Well, Sir Wilfrid Laurier beat him to it. The Twentieth Century belongs to Canada!"

"I'm with you, mate," said Drake, stroking his beard. "But we've lost this round. And there was strong language on both sides. Our people regret that and would like to make things up with a going-

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away present—you know, no hard feelings, come back soon, King Theodore."

"That's a fine idea, Commander."

Looking left and right, Drake took a square hefty-looking package wrapped in brown paper from under his coat. "The thing is, we don't want to make a big deal out of it. We want you to slip the present in the King's luggage so he'll find it when he unpacks back home."

Bullock took the package. "After the big dinner tomorrow, they'll bring the luggage down to the front hall. I'll do it then."

Drake was halfway out the French doors. He stopped to give Bullock a gentle look. "Better you do it tonight, mate," he said and disappeared into the darkness.

By godfrey, thought Bullock, now he needed some clever ruse to get by the guard at the door to the King's apartment. He hurried off to scout the situation. Sure enough, when he peered around the corner the spitbearer himself was standing guard, practicing dirty looks to pass the time.

Suddenly Bullock had a brainstorm. He walked around the corner and held his fist to his ear like a telephone. "Tokki-tokki longfella, Lola, bigfella," he said.

Instantly every dark cloud passed from the big man's face and he dashed off down the hall. But he dashed right back and, pointing to the spot on the floor where Bullock was supposed to stand, he handed over the royal spit. Then he demonstrated with his knee, two hands, and a dozen grimaces how many times he would break Bullock's spine if he left his post. This done, he scampered away on happy bare feet.

Leaning the spit against the wall, Bullock popped inside the apartment. From the dark vestibule he could see into the living room, where the King was reading in English to his wives arranged on the rug around him. The story was "The Gingerbread Boy." The King spoke carefully, now and then raising a finger to underline some nice turn of phrase. Bullock regretted he could not tarry there, for the story had been his favorite in grade one. He edged around in the shadows close to the wall until he came to the first open door. Luckily, it was the King's bedroom. Bullock slipped the package under a stack of silk shirts in a half filled royal suitcase and returned the way he'd come.

When he got back to his room, the Ambassador was waiting for him. "Cook's whipped up something for that dry-skin problem he says you've got, Maynard," said the Ambassador, leading Bullock

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into the bathroom. The tub was three-quarters full of an oily liquid with squeezed lemon halves floating around in it.

Bullock peered down into the tub doubtfully.

"It's mostly warm olive oil," explained his host. "Then there's lemon juice, crushed garlic cloves, bay leaf, salt, and fresh ground pepper. Cook says an hour's soak should do the trick."

The ingredients sounded harmless enough. Hanging his hat on the back of the door, Bullock unbuttoned his tunic.

"Those hands of yours are soft enough, so I brought something to keep them out of the treatment," said the Ambassador, stepping back into the bedroom.

"It's all the PR work," called Bullock as he continued undressing. "Should I jump right in?"

"Keep your shirt on," came the reply.

But Bullock had already taken his shirt off. He decided to keep his shorts on instead. They were regulation Mountie boxer shorts of scarlet and navy stripes with *RCMP* in gold down the hem closest to the heart. Gingerly he stepped into the tub and sat down, keeping his forearms out of the liquid. Say, it wasn't all that bad.

The Ambassador returned, carrying two small glasses of milky liquid on a tray. Under his arm was what looked like a pair of silver boxing gloves sewn together at the knuckles. Putting the tray on the floor, he sat down on the edge of the tub and slipped the gloves over Bullock's hands.

As he buckled up the wrist straps, he said, "Maynard, did I mention that King Theodore is without male issue? Several years ago, he named me and several other lesser princes from whom he must choose his successor to head our embassies around the world. As it happens, tomorrow is the fiftieth anniversary of his ascension to the throne, the day on which custom demands he announce his selection. He has said he will make his choice on the basis of our hospitality. I have every reason to believe that if all goes well at the dinner tomorrow I will be named Crown Prince. If I am, you will have played no small part in the matter."

When Bullock made modest noises, the Ambassador added, "Tomorrow may be a bit hectic for all of us. That's why I'm delighted the King has asked me to present you with this little commemoration of his visit a bit ahead of time." Opening a narrow velveteen box, he displayed a gold-and-blue-enamel sunburst of crossed knives and forks on a red-and-white-checked ribbon.

"The Order of King Theodore, Third Class!" exclaimed Bullock,

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remembering it from the picture book. He puffed out his chest, imagining how he'd look with that little number around his neck.

"This calls for a toast," said the Ambassador, sticking one glass of whitish liquid between Bullock's mittened thumbs and taking the other himself. "This is mikki-mikki, our national spiritous drink, a concoction of fermented coconut milk and various roots."

Smiling proudly, Bullock downed his mikki-mikki. Then three things happened. First, he remembered reading that the Order of King Theodore was only awarded posthumously. Second, he noticed the Ambassador had not touched his drink. And third, he felt himself becoming very, very tired.

Morning was glowing through the frosted bathroom window when Bullock awoke. He felt wonderfully refreshed, if a little sheepish about falling asleep in the tub. As he wiped the bottoms of his feet on the bath rug, the Ambassador strode into the room. "Quick, Maynard, King Theodore's called a come-as-you-are party downstairs in the kitchen."

"But I'm all oily. I smell of garlic."

"You can't refuse. The King would think you weren't a sport," said the Ambassador.

"Can't I even take off the mitts?"

"Wouldn't that be cheating? I didn't think Mounties ever cheated," observed the Ambassador.

Bullock couldn't argue with that. He followed along out into the hall where the spitbearer's two assistants were waiting with folded arms. "These gentlemen will escort you to the party by the back stairs," said the Ambassador. "I'll pop in later. I've still some dinner arrangements to make." Bullock's host stepped into the elevator and, giving him a melancholy look, pushed the Down button. He was gone before Bullock remembered to ask about the posthumous business.

Bullock was surprised to find the only people in the kitchen were the cook, who was leaning against the chopping block tossing a shiny red apple from hand to hand, and the spitbearer, sharpening the tip of the royal spit with a rat-tailed file. The cook barked an order that ended with "giddy-giddy-giddy." Immediately, the two assistants plunged twenty wiggling fingers and thumbs into Bullock's middle. He tried to fight them off but his hands were imprisoned in the mittens. There was really nothing he could do but throw back his head and roar with laughter.

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When his mouth was at its widest, the cook stepped forward and wedged in the apple. At his second order, each assistant grabbed Bullock by a thigh and an armpit and held him in the air parallel to the floor and facing the spitbearer. That gentleman strode forward ceremoniously and scratched a cross with the point of the spit on the top of Bullock's breastbone just below his chin. Then he moved back to get a run at his target, uttered a fierce war cry, and charged. Until that moment, Bullock thought maybe the whole thing was the initiation into the order of King Theodore.

Now he strained every muscle to break free. His captors, struggling to keep a grip on his oily skin, leaned together to trap his body between theirs. Like a greased pig, Bullock popped out of their grasp and onto the floor. The spit passed over him and imbedded itself in the wall. It would have skewered the two assistants who had fallen into each others arms, but they threw themselves to the floor. The charging spitbearer tripped over Bullock's head and went crashing down on top of them.

Hooking an elbow over the still-vibrating spit, the dazed Bullock pulled himself to his feet and made for the open door to the backyard. The cook tried to stop him with a flying leap from behind but couldn't get a grip on Bullock's oily shoulders and came crashing down on his face.

Bullock sped out the door, across the patio, and past the white-hot bed of coals in the barbecue pit. As he rounded the corner of the Embassy, the whole filthy scheme came to him in a flash. The great eats, all the massages, the overnight marinade—they meant to cook him up and feed him to King Theodore! Wait till the family of nations heard this one! Bullock galloped full tilt across the grass and down the circular driveway to the gates. But they were fifteen feet high—not even a Mountie could climb something like that without using his hands. Now what?

As Bullock's mind raced, he heard a loud bellow and turned. The sight of the spitbearer, that tattooed brown giant, that master of a thousand hideous faces, charging down on him with his formidable iron spit proved quite a tonic. Suddenly Bullock's elbows sprouted ten fingers each, his toes manipulated miracles, and his chin became another thumb as he scrambled up the iron bars. He made it to the top just as the spitbearer reached the bottom.

Quickly Bullock faked a move to the left, making the man commit his weapon through the bars. Then he jumped down to the right. The impact drove his teeth deep into the apple, which split in half

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and fell to the ground. A car was parked across the street. As Bullock dashed for it, he saw there was a man behind the wheel eating a sandwich out of a brown-paper bag. He looked up when Bullock pounded on the window. It was Drake! As he ran around to the passenger side, Bullock saw the spitbearer sprinting back to the Embassy to work the gate switch.

"By godfrey, you're a sight for sore eyes, Commander," said Bullock, getting in and pulling the car door shut. "Let's get out of here pronto!" Quickly he told of the Macaroon Islanders' damnable scheme. But when he'd finished and the car was still sitting there, he bounced up and down impatiently. "Let's go before they're swarming all over us!"

His sandwich done, Drake brushed the bread crumbs from his beard. "I envy you, mate," he said, "getting this chance to lay down your life so the Twentieth Century can belong to Canada."

Bullock blinked.

"All right," said Drake impatiently, "here it is in a nutshell. If the King likes dinner, he'll name the Ambassador his successor. The Ambassador wants Canada to have the naval base. That's why I had you put a bomb in the royal luggage. The King's jet will disappear over the Pacific. Yes, when he started dealing with the Turks, old Theodore signed his own death warrant. Look on yourself as the condemned man's last hearty meal."

Bullock turned pale. "Does the new Prime Minister know about this?"

Drake laughed. "Canada'd sure as hell never get anything done if she had to wait for the politicians. You can all thank your lucky stars there are a few of us highly placed individuals in the armed services, government, and industry who won't sit idly by and watch our nation's birthright go down the tube."

Across the street, the Embassy gates started to swing open. The spitbearer and his two assistants were running down the driveway. Bullock's only hope was to make a break for it. But as his mittened thumbs fumbled at the door handle he heard a cruel "giddy-giddy-giddy" behind him. As Bullock roared with laughter, Drake took a bright red apple from his lunch bag and jammed it in the Mountie's mouth. Then, tickling with one hand and steering with the other, he drove in through the Embassy gates.

Drake, who had come back to the kitchen with them to refill his thermos, was watching with mild interest from the coffee urn. The

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first assistant held Bullock in a full nelson, arms through his armpits, hands locked tightly together at the nape of his neck. The second assistant stood behind the first, gripping Bullock's knees in his arms. Bullock's eyes were as big as saucers and he made protesting noises from behind the apple as the spitbearer demonstrated with considerable relish how he was going to spiral the spit in through the breastbone and out under the coccyx.

The arrival of the Ambassador interrupted this graphic display. When he insisted on having a word with Bullock, the cook protested with many "tikki-tikki's," gesturing at the clock and the greying coals outside the door. But at last he gave in and, pointing to two pails in the corner, he ordered the second assistant off on an errand.

The Ambassador came over to Bullock, who stood with his head bowed in a full nelson. "Maynard," he said, "these last few days I've been pretending to myself that you understood the sacrifice you were being asked to make. But, of course, how could you? I'm sorry. I just want you to know that your death will toll the knell for a royal house built on human bones. One day when this cannibal earth of ours swallows up King Theodore, I will become king, the first of a benevolent vegetarian line that will banish terror from the Macaroons. Generations of my people yet unborn will bless your name, Maynard, and that of your charming wife, the Widow Bullock. You understand, don't you?"

When Bullock moaned from behind the apple, the Ambassador signaled the first assistant, who made the Mountie's head bob up and down. "Bless you, Maynard," said the Ambassador. "Now I must go."

"Same here," said Drake, screwing his thermos shut. "What's up next doesn't sound like a Canadian kind of thing."

"Come along then, Commander," said the Ambassador. "I'll get the gate for you."

When they'd gone, the cook moved to pick up Bullock's legs himself so they could get on with the business. But the kitchen phone rang. Scowling, the cook answered it. Then he offered the receiver to the spitbearer. "Longfella, bigfella," he said, making a sour face. "Mushi-mushi Lola."

In an instant the radiant spitbearer was babbling into the phone. The cook tried to take the spit from him, intending to do the job on Bullock himself, but the tattooed giant would not give it up. When the impatient cook persisted, a hard shove sent him tottering across

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the room. He collided with the second assistant returning with the two pails of bathtub marinade the cook had wanted for basting. Both men fell and the oily mixture gushed across the floor. Bullock saw the stuff coming and raised his feet. When his captor tried to adjust his footing to accommodate Bullock's weight, he slipped and crashed over backward.

The floor was awash with marinade. From the island of his stunned captor's chest, Bullock jumped up onto the chopping block to a corner of the stove and then, leaping past the giggling, lovesick spitbearer, he was out the back door. When he reached the front of the Embassy, Drake's car had started down the driveway toward the opening gates. Maynard crouched and ran, hoping to get behind the car and follow it out to freedom. But the Ambassador must have seen him from the front window. The gates started to close. Bullock straightened up and turned on all the juice, heading straight for the gates now.

Drake looked around to see what was wrong. When he saw Bullock sprinting across the grass, he stopped his car and got out. Very coolly he checked his revolver as he came down the driveway with long strides. When he was twenty feet from the gates, he stopped, spread his legs, hunched his shoulders, and with the weapon in both hands he aimed at the very middle of the precious, narrowing space through which Bullock would have to pass or be spitted, roasted, and eaten. Bullock knew the man couldn't miss at that range. Still he ran on. It was his only hope.

Drake fired three times. Bullock felt two shots graze the hairs on his leg and one knick his shorts as he twisted sideways to pass through the closing gates. Then the gates clanged shut and he was out on the street running for his life. (Later he would decide he'd been saved because Drake had tried some fancy shooting, hoping to bring him down with a flesh wound to the thigh or calf, something they could cover over with a pineapple slice or a maraschino cherry.)

As Bullock turned the corner at a flat-out run, he looked back and saw Drake standing with his hands on the bars of the gate staring after him while down the driveway behind him stormed the spitbearer, his assistants, and the cook, excitedly shouting "Tikki-tikki!"

Bullock tried to make his way back to Mountie headquarters by falling in with a group of joggers, but the apple gave him away. Then while he was being charged with indecent exposure at the

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police station he rashly made a wild-eyed stab at miming out the morning's events. The police psychiatrist came and sedated him.

He awoke several hours later in a cell. The apple was gone and his jaw felt as though they'd used a crowbar to remove it. It wasn't easy convincing a guard that the *RCMP* on his shorts wasn't his monogram. Then Inspector LaPierre took his own sweet time to come down to the station to identify him.

They found the Embassy dark. They arrived at the airport two hours after the departure of the royal jet. According to witnesses, King Theodore had looked angry and bilious and the Ambassador had been taken aboard by three big tattooed guys as if under duress. It was too late to scramble The Straight Arrows, the Mountie aerobatic team, to force the royal jet to return.

The next day, the world learned that King Theodore's plane had disappeared a hundred miles off the coast of Vancouver Island. Among the scattered wreckage recovered from those waters was an unsealed diplomatic pouch bearing the coat of arms of the Macaroon Islands. Inside was a bottle of steak sauce and, wrapped in a napkin, a cooked and partially eaten human hand with a scrimshaw pinkie ring.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

Setting her backpack down, the girl extracted a well used give-away map of Central London from beneath the pack's cover and scribbled on the margin. "I guess if it comes to a civil suit or whatever, I could make—an affidavit, is it? A sworn statement. This is my name and address in New York, daytime phone number. Just in case."

A touching hands-across-the-sea story from Jeffry Scott, a British journalist who has worked on both sides of the Atlantic and a fictionist whose substantial contribution to EQMM has covered a remarkable range . . .

WITNESS TO PRIDE

by *JEFFRY SCOTT*

Danny Tyler's tragedy, if that is not too dramatic a term, was that he didn't feel old. His hair had gone and the backs of his hands were mottled as a thrush's egg. These days he had trouble with long flights of stairs, let alone the lofty, nest-harboring trees of boyhood. He was prey to slyly capricious aches that shifted as soon as he attempted to locate or put a name to them.

But that was all merely physical. Inside he felt the same as ever. Because he wasn't old—he'd simply been born nearly seventy years ago and that was a very different kettle of fish.

It hurt and angered Tyler that so many people, including a surprising number of caring and intelligent ones, seemed unable to grasp such a simple concept. They might say "You're as old as you feel," but they didn't believe it, far less put it into practice.

Danny Tyler lacked much book-learning. He'd attended an ugly

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grey box of a building with *Fear God, Honor the King* carved above its lintel and had had reading, writing, and simple arithmetic drummed into him. But he'd read a bit and thought more. His theory was that contempt for the old was the last acceptable form of bigotry.

Some of the treatment he resented would have been illegal, he mused sourly, if inflicted on grounds of gender or race. You couldn't—and a damned good job, too—shout racist abuse in the street. Not within earshot of a copper, anyway. But you could and often did dismiss a perfectly respectable citizen as "a silly old sod" and get away with it.

Somebody had just done that very thing. Tyler was crossing the road to the bus station, using pedestrian-controlled traffic lights, when a car jumped them, front fender positively brushing the back of his leg. He cried out in shock, turning to protest, and the car had slowed long enough for its driver to bawl that insult.

Tyler was still ablaze with indignation while boarding the silent bus. Cars, he brooded, had a lot to do with modern rudeness and impatience. In his youth, he'd known nobody who ran a car. The sight of one in Tyler's street had been an event. Most ordinary folk had walked or waited for the tram, the bus, or the train. The business of living had human pace then.

Lead in the petrol poisoned the air, dwarfing anything launched by the Huns in Flanders in his father's time. He had seen a TV documentary about the effects, deposits building in infant brains, making youngsters hyperactive, unable to concentrate. No wonder kids acted like aliens and dressed like lunatics. It all came back to impatience. It was a hell of a world. He'd be glad to snuff it and get out of things, Danny lied to himself in all sincerity.

The diatribe was so absorbing he didn't notice that the bus had started. The 584A route was an odd one—frequent stops for the first few miles, then semi-express across South London to the airport. This produced a mix of passengers, the same old local faces and a few strangers, usually stowing cases in the niche beneath the stairs to the upper deck.

This summer evening, Danny Tyler had no competition for his favorite seat—the long one at the back. He could settle into the corner, cross his legs, and arrange the sheaf of flowers on his lap. So far the only other passenger was a tall girl with a backpack on the seat beside her. She had a gleaming veil of dark hair and olive skin. Tyler approved of the girl, exotic without being flashy and not one of your skinny, sulky madams but a real woman.

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Aware of his stare, she smiled placidly, friendly and not unkindly amused, before returning to her fat paperback. Danny preened himself and felt a shade better about life.

At the next stop, Mrs. Um got on with her three rather ghostly children—silent, pallid, large-eyed urchins. "Evenin', Mrs. Um," Tyler mumbled, and she nodded back. He wasn't sure of her name. She was a cleaner at the Mission Hall and went straight from early-hours stints there to the checkout at Tesco in the High Street. Danny approved of her as well as the girl with the backpack, in a totally different way. She and her kids were shabby yet surviving. There was never any sign of a husband.

The bus rolled along. They were making good time as stop after stop slid past, nobody wanting to board or alight. He nodded in satisfaction and then chuckled at the inanity of pleasure over arriving punctually or even a little before the expected time when one's destination was a cemetery.

Tyler noted the ghost children peering at him and whispering and hastily converted the chuckle to a cough. Still, it was a good one, that—he'd remember to tell Gladys when he got ho—

Irritation as much as grief clamped down on him as he realized that he couldn't tell his late wife anything. He was on his way to tidy her grave and show his face, like, as he had been doing once a week for the past four years. Perhaps the world had every right to snub or downgrade him, wool gathering like that.

Defiantly, he shrugged. Say what you like, it was comical. He could almost hear Gladys wheezing, "Lor', Danny, talk about daft! Think I might get tired of waiting, go to the pictures instead, nice Robert Redford film? Slip back to the King and Crown for a drop o' port?"

She'd always seen the funny side of things, his Glad. More important, hearteningly, she had perceived humor in decidedly unfunny things, too. She would have known that he wasn't *old* old.

Pain flared in his shin, the flowers went flying, he gasped. A kaleidoscope of impressions burst around him—the thin stench of motor oil and unwashed flesh, cheap scent, a broad black-leather back, chrome studs winking. An obscenely naked, shaven head sprouting a tuft of red and yellow dyed hair.

Two of them, a hulking youth and a girl, stamping down the aisle from the back step to sprawl across seats toward the front. Retrieving his flowers, Danny called after them, "You want to watch where you're going?"

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The girl turned the face of a carnival death's head to him, skin apparently whitewashed, panda circles around her eyes. "Shut yer ——— mouth, you." The boy yelled, "Yeah, shut yer mouth or I'll throw you off. Don't like poofters, blokes what carry boo-kays. Just keep yer ——— trap shut."

Tyler pretended not to hear. He stared at the opposite window and saw the backpack girl, in reflection, stowing her book away, tensing. Mrs. Um had protective arms across three sets of narrow shoulders.

The punk girl was screeching at him, "Come on, *Raquel*, give us a twirl. Or my mate'll shove yer bleeding flahs up yer nose."

Danny felt sweat under his arms, a trickle in the groove between his nose and upper lip.

For a while the two tormenters were silent and Danny's skipping heart fell back to normal.

The conductor clattered down the stairs. Before he could demand money, the youth grunted, "Shove off or you'll get a knuckle sandwich."

A slender Asian with a worried face under much blue-black, carefully arranged hair, the conductor hurried back upstairs. The youth guffawed. "Pay ——— money to ride on this ——— mobile slum? That wog must think I just got off the same boat as 'im." And then the boy started to curse at the top of his voice, not at anybody or anything in particular, but for the joy of outrage, while the dreadful girl giggled and waved her arms as if conducting the ugly voice and uglier words.

Thinking of Mrs. Um's children, Danny Tyler knew it wasn't right. He put the flowers down in the crease between the back of the seat and its cushions so that they would not roll onto the floor, took a deep steadying breath, and stood up.

"Now stop that! Shame on you, son, in front of kiddies. And ladies present as well." He couldn't prevent a quaver, a flavor of entreaty.

The teenage harpy whispered fervently, waited, whispered some more, then the youth heaved himself up. "Right. I'll have you, old cock."

Tyler said, "You wouldn't go on that way in front of your mother, now, would you?" A voice within whimpered that he couldn't run, the bus was going too fast.

The hulking boy was on him when the bus braked hard. Danny had thrown up an arm, covering his belly with the other. A detached

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level of his being detected that his attacker was a coward egged into this by the girl. The little monster was pale and flurried.

Whether the boy recoiled or was taken off balance as the bus jerked forward once more was impossible to decide in hindsight, but the result was spectacular—hyperbolic as a dream. Reeling back, the boy bounced off one of the upright chrome rods meant to steady standing passengers. His hands grasping air, he retreated on his heels and fell on top of the girl.

"Rotten bastard!" she screeched the length of the bus. "You 'ad brass knuckles—you coshed 'im or summing!"

Confused, dizzy with relief, Tyler snapped, "Be quiet or I'll slap your face." Mrs. Um gave him a fleeting look of mingled surprise, shy admiration, and an attempt at conventional disapproval of making a scene. The ghost children uncurled warily and opened their eyes. "What happened, Mum?" the smallest demanded.

With a start, Danny realized the bus had stopped and they were at the end of the route. Weary and unknowing, the driver trudged toward the coffee stall. The conductor, carefully averting his eyes, pelted downstairs and followed.

"He wouldn't of done nuffing, there was no call to beat him up, you got no *right,*" the dreadful girl sniveled. The boy, still pillowed on her shoulder, mumbled a scared and savage plea for silence.

Danny picked up his flowers and stepped off the bus. The backpack girl swung her pack out of range when he made to help her with it. "I can manage fine, sir," she said. American accent. "Look, do you need my backup?"

He gaped, then imagining he understood, replied smugly, "He's learned his lesson, luv. And I can look after myself, ta."

"No," she said. "I think maybe he could sue you. Him and that bimbo, their word against yours. I was the only other person who really saw what went down."

Setting the pack down, she spoke abstractedly. "If I miss this flight, I pay extra. Look, should you need a witness—" Extracting a well used giveaway map of Central London from beneath the pack's cover, she scribbled on the margin. "I guess if it comes to a civil suit or whatever, I could make—an affidavit, is it? A sworn statement. This is my name and address in New York, daytime phone number. Just in case."

Tyler gravely tucked the torn-off scrap of paper into a waistcoat

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pocket. He always wore the three-piece suit to attend the grave. "Thank you, my dear."

She smiled warmly. "Guess I worry too much, huh? So long and good luck, sir."

Evidently, Mrs. Um was a raconteur. The incident turned Danny Tyler into a neighborhood celebrity. One or two older folk stopped him in the street, relative strangers spoke to him for the first time in months, the home-beat policeman winked knowingly. There was even a tiny item in the local weekly rag: HAVE-A-GO PENSIONER ROUTS BUS LOUT.

Tyler wasn't a drinking man but had looked in at the King and Crown on Friday nights out of payday habit, and continued to, carefully, on his pension. The Friday following the affair, Roger Lacy, the publican, boomed, "Yer money's no good, Pop. Try a nice big Scotch on the management."

The whisky went down like vitriol and left a taste like turpentine. Danny wasn't used to spirits. Tony Freeman, Lacy's brother-in-law, loomed over him while he blinked and smacked his lips.

"Fancy anuvver? No hurry—I've put a tenner behind the bar with your name on it. A goer like you, he shouldn't go short." Tony Freeman was a villain and blowhard. Danny was inclined to detest his comradeship.

Oblivious, Freeman chortled. "I'd love to've seen you stuff that twit. How'd you do it?" He mimed feint and hook, laughed loudly, and slapped Tyler's shoulder. "Life in the old 'uns yet! Go on, how'd you deck him, then?"

Ashamed of himself, slightly fuddled, Danny said gruffly, "Just the way you said, Tone." Schooled by sad experience, he expected Freeman to nod carelessly and move on. Instead the fellow sat down, eyes sparkling.

"They reckon you was a boxing champion back in the Army."

"Not to say champion. I boxed for the battery, did a bit—" Tyler fumbled tobacco into his pipe. "Well, the war was on, so I never did well from it. I remember in Italy, must've been 'forty-five, we had this tournament in a lemon grove. Yes, trees full of lemons. And this chap they'd put up—"

He woke next morning with a pounding headache and firm grounds for believing he'd made a fool of himself.

He paused in scrubbing his dentures under the cold tap. Gladys

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wouldn't have let him get away with such pub boasts. "Gerroff, Danny, you a boxer? You only looked after the team's kit, helped with the coaching."

But then he would never have spouted old soldier's lies with Gladys at his side. Come to that, had she been alive he wouldn't have been on that bus in the first place.

He grunted ruefully. Hard to tell *where* things started. If the lovely American girl hadn't made him feel protective— If Mrs. Um's children hadn't been quailing under a torrent of raucous filth from that wretched couple— If the roadhog hadn't come within an ace of running him down, setting his temper simmering—

Tyler was starting to forget the petty melodrama when a brace of embarrassed young men called at his house. He was just about to set off for the bus depot, Gladys's day had come round once more. "Like a word with you, Mr. Tyler," the spokesman announced. "Indoors, eh? No need to let the whole street know your business."

Danny stood aside, nonplussed but automatically deferring to authority. The taller man was showing him a warrant card. "Sergeant Whelan, Rywell CID. I dare say you know Syd Pointer."

Tyler frowned, peered. "Oh, it's you." He hadn't recognized the community policeman in civilian clothes.

Sergeant Whelan, sandy and scrubbed, sat on the extreme edge of the chair. "What it is, Mr. Tyler, there was a spot of bother, an incident as you might say, on the 584A about ten days ago. The fifth of this month, to nail it down. Making it the Tuesday." He waited, politely expectant.

Nodding, Tyler said, "I catch that bus every Tuesday."

Whelan nodded, too. "We know, Mr. Tyler. Part of the reason we're here. Small part, mind you. There's plenty more, I'm afraid. Anything you'd like to say? Before you do—" Glibly, he recited the official warning.

Anything you say . . . may be given in evidence.

Tyler listened incredulously, without truly hearing. Thinking, She said this would happen, that nice Yank bird. Thank God I took her bit of paper. Aloud, "It's to do with that kid? The one with all the mouth, needs it washing out with soap? You want to ask him what *he* did?"

"Difficult," PC Pointer remarked drily. "He's dead, Danny. —Hey, put your head down, breathe steadylike.

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"That's better— Name of Lionel Dean Ashcroft, eighteen years of age, came from Densey—way off our patch, north of the river."

"Dead."

"Afraid so." Sergeant Whelan's gravity made it more than an empty form of words. "Don't feel too bad. I'm saying nothing that won't come out in court. Ashcroft had an abnormally thin skull, see. When you whacked him, it caused a fracture, internal damage, blood building up— One of those things."

Sergeant Whelan's manner put Danny in mind of the undertaker after Gladys's death. Brisk but muted, an air of shallow, all-purposes understanding. "Talk it over with your brief, Mr. Tyler. You'll be legally-aided if you can't afford a solicitor. Meanwhile, I'm afraid I must ask you to accompany us to Jubilee Lane police station, where you'll be invited to assist us with our inquiries and may make a statement if you so wish."

When the trio emerged from the house, people had gathered. It was that sort of district—police cars didn't have to be marked to be spotted. Tony Freeman shouted, "Tell 'em nothing, Danny! We're clubbing together, down the K and C, we'll hire you a great brief!"

A fat woman, congested with mucous and indignation, sputtered, "If you coppers were protectin' us proper, streets was safe, he wouldn't of had to do yer work for yer!" There was even tentative applause as the car door slammed.

Tyler's forefinger investigated his waistcoat pocket, checking for the piece of paper the American girl had given him.

Not an introspective man, he was startled and puzzled at feeling so good. Excited and fulfilled. The crowd had been admiring, Sergeant Whelan respectful. Sitting alongside, PC Pointer was giving him a reassuring jerk of the chin.

People were listening to him, not turning away in mid-sentence, and that had been the case for days now. He wasn't old any more. Or rather he was, but he was the old man who had—newsprint flashed across his inner vision—routed a bus lout.

Danny moved with exquisite care, the maneuver occupied him for the rest of the distance to the place where he would be charged. The policemen couldn't be blamed for missing it. After all, he was docile, sensible, and had been provoked to manslaughter.

Neither of them noticed the tightly screwed pellet of paper he discarded on the floor of the car.

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"The Scapegoat," the first short story ever written by Rhoda Koenig, book critic of New York *magazine, is a gimlet look at office relationships in the New York publishing world. That world is substantially different now from when Rona Jaffe wrote about it 35 years ago in* The Best of Everything, *but some of the people who inhabit it are alarmingly the same . . .*

THE SCAPEGOAT

by RHODA KOENIG

Everyone knew Marian had done it but nobody knew why. At least not the real reason. I was probably the only one who could have explained what got Marian featured on page 3 of the *Post* and a slightly less prominent spot in the *News*. But I never did, for the whole point of Marian's act was to hide the truth. And I didn't think things would go any easier with her if I told.

Marian Layton and I had become friends soon after she came to work at Gissing & White. Many of the girls who accept a book publisher's slave wages for secretarial work do so because they think they will be entering the portals of romance at 9:30 every morning. Famous authors will bump into them in the corridor and take them to lunch at the Four Seasons. Editors will gossip about their writers' sex lives and about million-dollar deals. Letters will arrive bearing the actual signatures of distinguished men and women, crammed with insights into their cultured minds.

In fact, the letters are more often pitiful excuses about missed deadlines or complaints that we haven't spent $50,000 advertising their book of children's tales from many lands, gossip seeks its own level or the one above it, and authors meet their editors at restaurants and say goodbye in them, looking all dreamy and creative while the editor fumbles for a dollar for the coat check.

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One time a writer of sexy thrillers did show up in the Gissing & White offices. He gave his name to the receptionist, who lit up with excitement, looked at the weedy little man in the dandruff-spattered green jacket, and said, "Where is he?" There was a reason we kept his photo off his books.

A certain amount of in-house sex always goes on, of course, but there would have been much less without Harry McIntyre. Well, you can see why I've never made better than assistant editor of the gardening division. Here I've just begun, and I'm getting ahead of my story.

Anyway, Marian was something special—the kind of perfect secretary you thought you'd never see any more, all the others a muddle of ambition and incompetence. Cheerful and efficient—her last job was assistant to a banking executive—she had good manners and could type, too. Barring the odd long lunch or sudden early departure, she was a model of efficiency such as we hadn't seen for years. Her looks were pleasantly old-fashioned, too—ladylike and trim, she had a very small waist and pale-blonde hair swept back from a wide calm brow.

I distrust blondes on principle, but Marian was one of the serene rather than the bubbly kind. We'd had two of those, both hired by Harry McIntyre and both with a tenure of about three weeks. I came in one day to find one of them peering anxiously at her typewriter and asked if I could help. "Oh," she said in the sweetest possible voice, "I'm looking for the M." That was too good not to repeat, and Harry didn't appreciate being giggled at by women who asked, "How's your new secretary? She found the F yet?" But then he and I had never had any use for each other. I'd putter around with my little garden gnomes, and he'd zip in and out, signing up the writers of blood-soaked spy novels and the s-and-s (shopping and screwing) books that keep us in the black. I was about fifteen years too old for Harry to acknowledge my existence—just a few months younger than he. Oh, dear. I suppose it's only appropriate that Harry should be sidling into this narrative and taking over, just the way he would in life. I suppose I might as well follow the course he so often inspired in life and give in.

As I expect I've made clear, Harry McIntyre was the office lech, and could be identified as such at twenty paces. He was tall and in pretty good shape, and his suits and ties were from the right places, but there was always something a little too shiny about him. I never witnessed one of his come-ons, but I got a hint of his style watching

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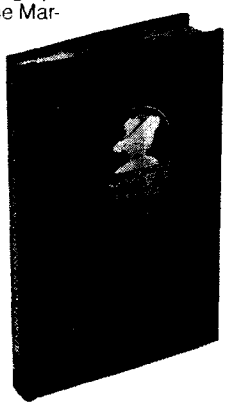

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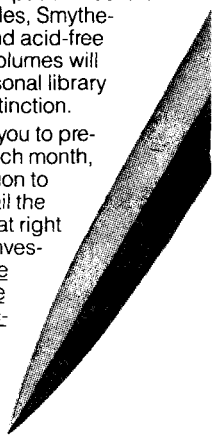

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him butter up the chairman's wife one day while his own wife laughed irrepressibly at the chairman's jokes. (Oh, yes, he had a wife. They always have wives, often good-looking.) I remember him leaning forward confidentially, the movement of his hands suggesting something between obsequiousness and scarcely repressed passion.

Marian got the full treatment soon after she arrived, and she reenacted it for me the next day: the eyelids dropping as suddenly as a broken venetian blind, the little movement of loose flesh around the mouth as his voice sank to a husky whisper, the hand briefly but firmly pressing her wrist and then tracing it gently with his index finger as he withdrew. It was an impressive performance. If Harry had been half as explicit as Marian's imitation, the silent movies had lost one of their greatest actors. Still, for every traveling salesman, the world has innumerable farmers' daughters, and between the women who were genuinely enraptured and the ones who were just looking for distraction, Harry did pretty well.

I asked Marian how she had left it. "Oh, I just told him I had other fish to fry," she said, smiling.

I couldn't help wondering who was in the frying pan. The travel-books editor and some of the sales reps had taken to hanging around her desk, but while she would have lunch with them she would never have dinner. Nor did she ever say anything about a boy friend, not even in that casual way some people have of saying "we" did this or that so you know there are two of them. Marian was certainly pretty and clever enough not to go wanting, and too sensible, I thought, to be waiting passively for some hopeless ideal. I decided she must be happy enough and put her silence down to extreme tact—a desire not to open a conversation that would be embarrassingly one-sided. But still I wondered.

I got my answer late one morning when I passed her empty desk as the phone was ringing. Admiring the geometric immaculateness of her desktop, the pencils sharpened to stiletto points, I picked up the phone. Before I could answer, a voice said, "Darling, I can't wait until lunch. I have to tell you how much I—"

I snapped out of shock and gently put the receiver down. As I turned around, Marian came trotting back. "Was that for me?" she asked.

"No," I said, feeling as guilty as if I'd been deliberately eavesdropping, "it was a wrong number." The phone began to ring again

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as I walked off, and I walked a little faster. Of course, I thought, remembering the sudden exits and the long lunches.

A couple of days later, Marian asked me if we could have lunch. She had clearly been dying for a confidante, and the accident of the phone call gave her an excuse. His name was George, she told me, he was 46, and he worked for the bank that dealt with G&W. Marian had come to us because people at the bank were beginning to talk, and George thought a publishing firm would be easygoing about time off. He made up (in cash) the difference in her salary when they met each week. This made me a little queasy, but, as Marian explained, he couldn't put his name on a check. She showed me his picture, which she had cut out of the company magazine. (He was afraid to give her a picture as well.) I suppose it was the severely responsible expression he wore for his official photograph, but George looked like an awful bore to me. Also, if I were designing an ideal beau, I'd give him considerably more hair than was left to old George.

"I wish you could see him when he's smiling," Marian said. "He looks completely different. When he smiles at me it's just the most wonderful thing in the whole world." I changed my mind right then about Marian's serenity. If George's smile was that pretty to her, what awful memories lay behind that smooth white brow? "Of course," she went on lovingly, "no amount of smiling is going to hypnotize me into thinking he has thick wavy hair. It's a shame he started losing it so early. But when I look at him I sort of cut off the frame a few inches above his eyes."

"Marian," I asked, "how old are you?" I had always assumed she was about 23, but something in her tone made me uneasy.

"I'm thirty-four," she said. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing," I said.

Marian's affair drifted along. Once a week, sometimes twice, she would nip away for a long lunchtime or an early five o'clock meeting, and every once in a while she would shyly but proudly bring out one of George's pretty compliments, like a cat dropping into your lap an ancient, fluff-covered toy it's found under the bed. As I would with the cat, I expressed wonder and delight at George's motheaten offerings, but the whole thing was getting on my nerves. I made excuses not to have lunch with her, and though, like a kitten, she was puzzled she was too fascinated with herself to mind very much.

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Then one Monday, after an out-of-town sales conference, the editors were trading gossip around the water cooler. (Yes, we actually have a water cooler, and people gossip around it. It's one of Gissing & White's fine old traditions, along with their salaries.) Harry McIntyre, it was said, had hooked up with one of our dippier best-selling authors, an emotionally mushy but physically hard-packed lady who writes about feeling and caring and sharing. Frances, a fiction editor, had had the room next to Harry's in Bermuda and had our full attention.

"I could tell by the way he monopolized her attention at the dinner table the first night that he was talking her into a new book—*How To Have a Relationship in Twenty Minutes*, say. Then, after dinner that night, I just happened to have an earache and I thought it would help if I pressed my ear against the wall—"

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed that Marian wasn't joining in this hilarity. She had returned to her desk and was sharpening her pencils with an air of intense concentration when I went over and asked if she was all right.

"I'm fine, thank you," she said in a tight voice. "I just don't think some things are as funny as you obviously do."

I remembered, then, that Marian had been more punctual—and more nervous—the past couple of weeks. As I turned away, she shoved into the electric sharpener a pencil that had already been honed to a fine point. It came out with a blunt end and she broke it in two and flung it into the metal wastebasket—whiz, snap, rattle, rattle, thump.

A month went by, and one scarcely heard a word out of Marian. Once in a while she rushed out early—not eagerly as before, but brusquely, almost angrily now. Then one morning as I approached her desk, I heard her, frigid and proper, talking on the telephone. "This is Miss Layton calling. Yes, Layton. I called yesterday and several times the day before, but Mr. Martin evidently hasn't been given my messages. *Don't* tell me you gave them to him, you ———. I know better." She slammed the phone down and started shaking. I backed away, not letting her know I had heard.

The next day when she asked me to have lunch, I said yes. Over our salads, she told me she had decided to give George up. "I suddenly saw everything in a completely different light," she said, like a novice nun explaining how she got the call. "I had been thinking how nice he was, how sad it was that his wife was so mean to him,

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and then it occurred to me that maybe he doesn't cheat on her because she's awful—maybe she's awful because he cheats on her." After this great mental breakthrough, Marian went on to say, she lost respect for George—and you can't keep up a relationship with a man you don't respect, can you? I agreed, and urged her to have the custard for dessert. Children, I thought, love custard.

The next few weeks seemed to show that my fears for Marian were groundless. I had thought she would fall apart when George dropped her, but she became more her old self than before—busy, efficient, good-natured. Still, there was something a little too bright about her—or do I only realize that now?

I had to go into Harry McIntyre's office one afternoon, my life at G&W not being entirely without its thrills, and there, bending over his desk with him, was Marian. Harry was laughing his obnoxious laugh and she was giggling. They both straightened up when they saw me. When I handed Harry the proofs I'd been asked to deliver, I scanned his desk to see what was so funny, but all that was on it were a few new dust jackets and his engagement book. He must have been making a joke about one of the jackets, I thought, probably the top one—for the latest book by his friend in Bermuda.

The next day Marian didn't come back from lunch. I mean she didn't come back at all. At four o'clock I called her apartment, and a man answered. He asked me sharply who I was and told me she couldn't come to the phone. I was indignant. Who was George, after the way he'd treated her, to take up with her again so casually and to be so abrupt with her employer? I started to tell him so, but he hung up. Now I was really angry, but also confused. What had all that noise in the background been—men's voices, the thumping and to-ing and fro-ing? Surely they hadn't gone up to her place to watch television. Well, tomorrow I would find out, and read her the riot act.

The next day the city found out what Marian had done on her lunch break. She had brought Harry McIntyre home, and after he'd dozed off she had gone to the kitchen and returned with a knife—and slit his throat. Then—and this is the part I found hardest to take—she had calmly got dressed and packed an overnight case before calling the police. "I thought it would be like a hospital," she told the astonished reporter. "That they would give you things, but it's nicer to have your own."

Marian pleaded guilty to the murder of Harry McIntyre, who, the

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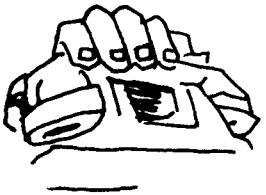
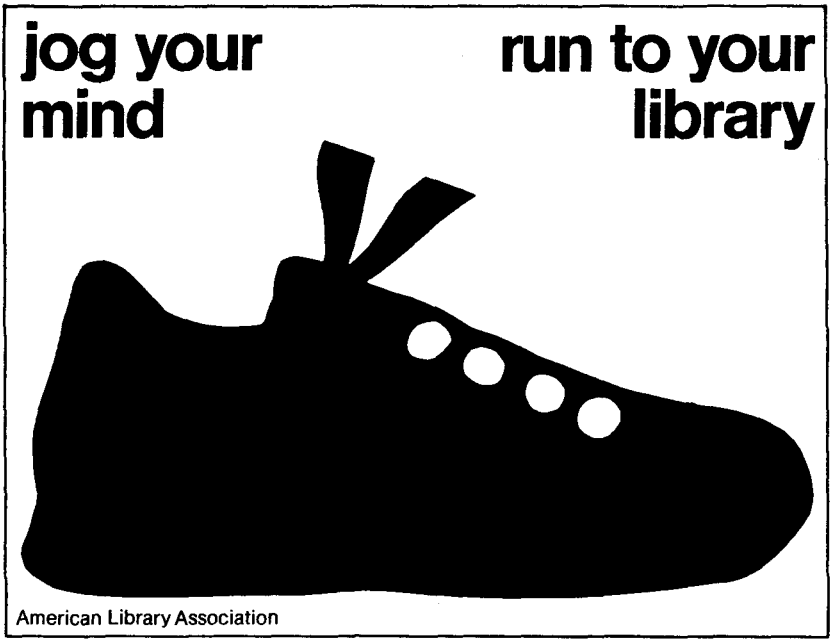
papers said, had refused to leave his wife for her. I went to see her before they took her away.

"Marian," I said, "why didn't you kill *George?*"

She turned her calm grey eyes on me and laughed in mild surprise. "George? Why would I want to kill George? I loved George." She was smiling, but it wasn't a nice smile. Then she started to laugh, and it wasn't a nice laugh. "I could *never* harm George," she said. "Not one of the few remaining hairs on his head."





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a *NEW* Neil Hockaday story by

THOMAS ADCOCK

"The inspector here tells me they call you Hock," Hizzoner said, the fish grin still riding on his lips. "Would that be 'hock,' as in to spit up?"

"What I was saying to the mayor," said Neglio, "was that there isn't a better man in the whole department for getting inside some bedbug's head than you. I think—the mayor and I think—you're the man we need on this little job of work here."

The cracking wise, streetwise Neil Hockaday taking on an assignment that could win him his gold shield. A story full of dark humor, dark truths, and heart . . .

ZERO MAN

by THOMAS ADCOCK

First, you have to try understanding why he did it. Which means you have to trouble yourself to know something about the scabby kind of world where a guy like Zero Man winds up—and what living in it does to him. Then, with a little time and luck and some help from your people in the street, you maybe can put him out of his misery. Which is not to mention the misery of every female inhabitant of New York City scared witless that she's about to become his next victim.

This should be obvious to any Police Academy rookie with a crewcut and a duffel bag, let alone a couple of hundred homicide detectives pulling down gold-shield salaries as well as brisk overtime when a psycho starts leaving his bloody signature all around town. But it isn't. Heather, a hooker snitch of mine, told me once, "You cops were smarter when you *looked* like cops who spent your time

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thinking inside-out about how to catch robbers. Now you look like a bunch of guys *trying* to look like cops, or what Hollywood thinks cops look like."

I hate to say it, but an awful lot of real cops I know spend an awful lot of time admiring fake cops on TV. The fake cops have lots of polished teeth and lots of moussed hair and dress like they're on their way to gallery openings in Soho and maybe some uptown disco afterwards. Worse yet, the bad guys they run down in precisely sixty minutes, with time out for commercials, are desperate caricatures. Heather's right. All this imagery is head-softening and the march against crime is slowing down. If it was up to me, cops wouldn't be allowed to watch the tube. This I have decided after three months of my black-and-white Philco being on the fritz.

Anyway, there *was* a time I remember when your average NYPD detective considered his work more absorbing than his wardrobe. He could be trusted to wear something like a brown suit with a boxy jacket so you wouldn't right away notice the .38-caliber revolver holstered under his armpit, a regulation Bancroft white shirt (short sleeves come June), and a necktie with a fat Windsor knot. And crepe-soled shoes, usually black and usually from the Abraham & Straus bargain basement over in Brooklyn. Sartorially, he didn't know much. But he managed to get in a good deal of cop legwork and a fair amount of deductive reasoning.

Nowadays it's all different. You walk into the Manhattan Central Detective Command—like I did last Tuesday when this guy Zero Man struck again—and even the guys with bald spots and middle-aged bellies look like they're trying out for parts on a popular TV show about a pair of twerpy cops in Miami. Nowadays they're wearing mohair suits with no-vent jackets and pleated trousers and pastel shirts from Saks. And Italian loafers with less honest leather on them than my house slippers. The only thing missing from last Tuesday's scene was one of those rock-and-roll soundtracks they run all the time on the show about the fake Florida cops. There were plenty of lights and cameras, though, in the form of television-news crews—all hungry for something on videotape that might rival the lurid junk in the morning tabloids.

And there was a familiar attraction to me in the person of a tall blonde lady reporter for one of the networks who is even more luscious in living color than she was on my Philco before it quit. I considered walking up to her and introducing myself as a player in the story she was after. Then I considered the odds against her

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believing me because of the way I was dressed. So I just stared at her a while before telling the duty sergeant I wanted to see the Manhattan chief of detectives, Inspector Tommy Neglio.

"Oh, so you do now, d'you? And just who're *you,* hey?"

I looked across the desk at a flat-headed, ham-faced sergeant who would never again know what it felt like to weigh merely two hundred but who nevertheless was dressed like some salad-eating actor from California. He looked at me like I was some station-house geek who'd wandered upstairs from the lobby when nobody was looking. No doubt it was my work clothes—black T-shirt with a picture of a British punk rocker named Slime-O, a pair of elderly blue-serge pants, a duck-billed cap, and a greasy overcoat a couple of sizes too big.

"Officer Neil Hockaday," I said. I flashed him the tin I had on a chain around my neck and his chubby features went from moon-white to flame-red. "From Street Crimes Unit—Manhattan. You know, the SCUM patrol."

"Jeez, pal, you coulda said somethin'," he complained.

"Like what?"

"Hell, I dunno."

The TV crews loitering around us figured something newsworthy might be up, so they started elbowing each other and switched on the kliegs. I was buzzed through the gate of the big wrap-around desk that separated reporters and other manner of riffraff from Inspector Neglio's inner sanctum. "G'wan inside the office," the sergeant said. "The inspector's been waitin' on you. Him and the Grand Pooh-Bah, which is how come these here vultures are hangin' around up here today."

I shook hands with Tommy Neglio, who looked me up and down and sighed. "Swell of you to dress up." Then he introduced me to the Grand Pooh-Bah and I shook hands with a familiar-looking guy, who was tall and paunchy and had wiry little tufts of brown-grey hair on the sides of a head otherwise full of pink skin. He was a lot less impressive in living color than he'd been on my Philco.

"So, Neil, you ever meet Hizzoner the mayor before?" Neglio asked.

I said I hadn't had the pleasure. I didn't bother saying how I don't vote much since everybody does the same thing once they're in office and I don't see much point in supporting redundancy.

"I've been hearing about you from the inspector," the mayor said.

"Yeah? How'm I doing?"

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My little play on the mayor's campaign slogan was more nervous than cocky and I meant no disrespect, but Neglio flinched and the Grand Pooh-Bah gave me one of those insipid smiles I get when somebody needs me a lot more than they like me. I should have known better. A regular working cop like me should only crack wise around regular people with regular egos. Talking to your big-time pols—or to most of New York's police brass, for that matter—is like walking through a minefield of faux pas.

"The inspector here tells me they call you Hock," Hizzoner said, the fish grin still riding on his lips. "Would that be 'hock,' as in to spit up?"

This time I just nodded yes, figuring that the personal percentage in my clamming up was probably high. Neglio seemed very much relieved by this discretion of mine and quickly got us down to business.

"What I was saying to the mayor," said Neglio, "was that there isn't a better man in the whole department for getting inside some bedbug's head than you. I think—the mayor and I think—you're the man we need on this little job of work here."

The bedbug he was talking about was a guy who four times had variously slashed, strangled, or shot his women victims. He chose them at random, it seemed, but there were two ghastly touches that made him perfect for tabloid horror. He always left a sort of calling card on the body—a piece of stiff colored paper on which he'd penciled Zero Man. And he'd prop up his victim into some reasonably natural pose so that he could leave her right in the middle of Manhattan someplace, safe in the knowledge that it would probably be hours before anyone noticed.

His first victim rode back and forth on the crosstown LL subway train between Eighth Avenue and Canarsie well past the afternoon rush before a conductor noticed that the woman in the fur jacket and fedora who'd been snoozing in her seat in the end car wouldn't be getting off under her own steam. Likewise, a janitor in a Murray Hill cinema tapped the shoulder of a woman who'd dozed through two showings of the feature attraction, her coat draped over her shoulders and a half-eaten box of buttered popcorn on her lap. The third victim was simply laid out flat on a wooden bench at Grand Central Station, in the waiting room that has become the province of the homeless. It turned out she was a Madison Avenue advertising executive.

And now it had happened again.

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Another random killing, another grisly discovery. And another occasion in which a small army of detectives couldn't turn up a decent clue.

Neglio picked up copies of the New York *Post* and *Daily News* from his messy credenza, fanned them out on top of his messy desk, and asked, "You seen the screamers today?"

If you were to read these two particular journals with any regularity, you would quickly appreciate why New York is a city on the brink of a nervous breakdown. Among the first things we see here every morning are the reasons for our insomnia the night before—those big, block-lettered headlines that make up the tabloid covers. I once worked a homicide up in Inwood where a bartender at a girly joint on Dyckman Street hacked clean through a guy's neck with a meat cleaver during a proprietary dispute involving a redheaded dancer. The *Post* screamed, HEADLESS MAN IN TOPLESS BAR. Another time I was called in on emergency crowd-control during a motion-picture shoot. The city hadn't bothered informing the public that what was happening way up on top of the Chrysler Building was just a movie, so several thousand frazzled New Yorkers thought there was a squadron of Army helicopters firing on a gigantic prehistoric flying monster perched up on the dome. The unwitting extras were diving into doorways for cover, fainting and hollering. We learned all about it in a *Daily News* story bannered, TERROR GRIPS CITY!

With newspapering like that, it's small wonder why anyplace you go in New York you're bound to run across twitchers and shufflers and mumblers and shriekers in the night. Many of these exercised people write headlines for the tabloids.

But this particular morning, I'd only seen *The Times*, a full-sized broadsheet paper of some distinction, which sees fit to print most of its local news back with the truss ads. Since I was in a hurry to meet Neglio, I'd gone only through the first section, which was pretty much taken up by stories on how nothing happened during the Geneva summit between Reagan and Gorbachev, tariff problems in the fishing industry of French territorial Miquelon Island, and threats to the delicate confederation of post-Tito Yugoslavia.

Even so, I could well imagine the tabs' treatment of yet another murder visitation by Zero Man. That much news I'd already heard on the radio. It seemed that the sexton of a fashionable Episcopal church on Park Avenue came across the latest victim, whom he'd

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believed for many hours to be a troubled young woman in prayerful meditation in one of the back pews.

The *Daily News* played it scoreboard style: ZERO MAN 4, POLICE ZIP! The *Post* went beyond mere reportage and offered a cool $25,000 reward to any reader who could haul Zero Man in, alive or, preferably, otherwise: POST TO MANIAC: DROP DEAD! Inside stories gleefully challenged the police department's capabilities—ARE MANHATTAN DICKS A PACK OF WIMPS? COPS FLOPPO, FIEND BOFFO—and did their very best to whip up more paranoia—SHOULD FEMMES FLEE FUN CITY? GOTHAM GALS FACE EXTERMINATION.

I said to Neglio, "Okay, so I see this thing is really out of hand."

"Out of hand, he says!" the mayor interrupted. "This is ri-*dic*-ulous!"

I tried again with Neglio. "What do you want me to do and when do you want me to start?"

Neglio also ignored the mayor. "From now on, Hock, you got this thing exclusive. You work your own snitches, we put some money out on the street for some more, you check the flops and the pervo joints and whatever else you can think of. And you report to me exclusive. I *want* this creep."

What the inspector wanted was the toughest kind of killer to hunt down, the kind who listens to personal demons the rest of us don't want to hear. Most homicides have logic to them, weird as it may be, and the logic translates into leads for even the most modestly alert cop. Besides which, killers mostly fall into time-stained categories: loose cannons, who leave bloody trails; average Joes provoked by simple and sorry combinations of passion and convenient weaponry, who leave bloody trails; dim bulbs and brutes, whose entire lives are bloody trails; and the contrite, who run straight to the nearest precinct station house to confess the whole bloody thing. (I leave out mob icings. In New York, there hasn't been a single successful prosecution on a mob contract since the electrocution of Louis "Lepke" Buchalter of Murder, Incorporated. Lepke was fried a month before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Since then, all deaths entertained by the mob have apparently been from natural causes.)

The plain truth is, most homicides are a lot less complex than the mystery writers would have you believe. But every so often along comes a Zero Man and the city needs cops with some of that old-time inside-out thinking Heather talks about.

"What do we know that the press doesn't?" I asked.

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"Hell of it is, they got about everything. Except they assumed that the bedbug wrote his name on *blank* pieces of paper and then left them on the bodies. Well, they're not entirely blank. One side he used to write down that crazy name of his, but the other's got some kind of astrological crappola on it."

Neglio handed me the first three calling cards and I looked at the killer's name on the blank sides. He had a florid hand, an almost schoolgirlish hand. Then the inspector gave me the fourth and newest piece of paper, the one that had come off the body of the woman found in the church. "This one he added something to," he said. "And so now you hold in your hand everything we know."

Just below his name on this fourth card, Zero Man had written a sentence in a smaller, more carelessly penciled and decidedly rougher hand: "Next I get the bitch who made me do it."

"Any useful background on the victims?" I asked.

"We're trying to pull it together, but don't count on anything," said Neglio. "It looks like they just happened to be female and just happened to be in places where people don't pay too much attention to people around them, so they were available on the days he decided to go off his nut, possibly when there were fewer people there than usual. You're looking for somebody who's after half the population and he doesn't care where he starts."

I considered Tommy Neglio's extraordinary order and the pressures that brought it about. There I was with the mayor and the Manhattan chief of detectives and the two of them were sweating the scandal sheets and a swarm of TV crews that would soon have to be fed. I also considered the virtue of selfishness, or what might be in this thing for me besides the glory of the collar. I'd been at patrolman rank my whole career, the last three with the elite SCUM patrol but patrolman nonetheless. I wouldn't mind the extra cash in my weekly pay envelope that would come with the rank of detective.

"What I'll do, Inspector, is bust this guy for you inside of a couple of weeks. Then I know you'll do the right thing and put out a word here and there about how I should probably get my gold shield at long last."

"You're getting crass on me, Hock."

The mayor piped in: "I don't know. If Hock here brings in our man and gets the damn press off my back before it's tourist season already, then maybe a promotion isn't some big fancy-schmancy price to pay."

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I decided to vote for the guy next time. That is, if he hadn't tunneled under too many more people by then and if it looked like he might never write another one of those cockamamie books of his.

By Friday night, I was exactly nowhere on the case and embarrassed to think back on how much dumb lip I'd blown. It's hard enough tracking a psycho in any panicky city you could name—in New York, it's something again because it means locating a single violent lunatic in a city with the world's largest variety of lunatics, many of whom are disguised as shrinks.

So far, I'd wasted half a week trying to pick up on the vine down around my East Village neighborhood, which still has a fair number of flophouses despite the gingerly incursion in recent years of earnest young men and women who wear shirts with alligators on them and have jobs where their fingernails stay clean. Flops around where I live are called hotels, like they were the same as Hiltons or Sheratons and maybe had restaurants off the lobby and snazzy bars with brass rails and chanteuses in low-cut dresses and barbershops and bellhops and all.

That's a laugh, but not a funny one. New York flops are full of falling men, whose remaining vital signs are hunger and thirst, mostly thirst. The guests are loud and profane. They look menacing and have a bummy odor to them, but they're nowhere as dangerous to the general public as quite a few well groomed types I've nailed in my time who eat and drink at places like "21" and smell like the inserts in *GQ* magazine.

Still, it's sometimes useful to start looking for loose talk in flops when things get strange in the respectable quarters of the city, where secrets and pretense and evasion remain important elements of the social fabric.

But not this time.

"Hock, I tell you, man, I 'preciate the treat, but I gotta say you lookin' in the very wrongest place." This I was told by my trustiest Bowery snitch, who drinks pretty much all day at a saloon where rye comes at thirty-five cents the jigger.

"What you got is a *uptown* crime, see. The zotz you want ain't passin' by this way, no sir. You be lookin' for some bird who got these neighbors who say, 'Owee, I can't believe such a fine gennulman did what he done—haw, I never would s'pected!' You know, jive like that, see.

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"Lemme say this for the dude, though. He got a bad name! Zero Man. Nobody gets no number on a zero, man."

Maybe he was right.

So Friday night I was uptown in the East Seventies waiting for Heather the hooker to show, because nobody knows more about kinks in Manhattan's polite society and because I hadn't seen my old friend in a long time. I told her answering service at noon that I'd spring for Scallops Viennese—which downtown is called Wiener Schnitzel—at a real buttoned-up, silk-stocking joint off Second Avenue with a maroon canopy out front, a sommelier and a maitre d'hôtel who are aging homosexual lovers and had something to do with the Third Reich, toilet attendants who make more off the books than most assistant D.A.s, and a neighborhood clientele that includes a lot of guys who have been instrumental in Heather's career. She left a message for me with her service: dinner at nine would be grand and she'd be delighted to get a load of the wives she'd heard about.

I sat at a bar nursing a five-dollar Scotch and staring at the four bits of colored paper, like if I looked at them long enough they'd start talking to me and tell me where to find Zero Man. They were each two inches by three, the paper stock was heavy and came variously in blue and pink and pale-green and yellow. On the printed sides were signs of the zodiac, sets of "lucky numbers," and unnerving little messages under the heading, "My Prophecy for You." The latest was:

> Cupid dropped a little dart &
> 'twill poison your heart! The
> happiness I see for you is
> beyond words. And why not?
> You're witty and sly and
> popular with the opposite sex.
> There is only this tiny warning
> I shall utter: Beware the false
> face!
>
> * * *
>
> . . . Now, drop another coin into
> the slot & I will tell you more!

Since Tuesday I'd been trying to think where on earth I'd seen these kinds of things before. And right then, waiting for Heather, it came to me. When I was a kid, we called them "fortune cards." You got them for five cents at neighborhood sweetshops, or the penny

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arcades in Times Square. It seemed so long ago, those days when tenements in Manhattan went for rent instead of ransoms and families with kids lived in them and people on the block read Winchell in the *Mirror* and nobody owned TV sets except the swells up in Lenox Hill. Now the video games have killed off skiball, kids don't care about the fortunes of tomorrow any more than they care about yesterday, nothing the celebrities do now is any more depraved than what real people have been doing all along, and if you want a decent egg cream you have to go all the way up to Arthur Avenue in The Bronx.

Heather walked in and my little reverie went all to pieces.

I heard guys at the tables behind me start coughing funny, which is something that happens a lot when she enters a room. Heather is just under six feet tall, she's blonde without being blowzy about it, and she has big hazel eyes, full lips, and a hopeful effect on every man's pulse. In another time and place, she could have been a czarina and the Bolsheviks wouldn't have stood a chance. She smiled at me like I was the only man at the bar and not too bad-looking and she'd just escaped a homely cousin's baby shower. I liked the way she let the lynx slide off her shoulders into the fluttery hands of the maitre d' and I liked what she wore underneath—a black gown with sequins that caught light in all the right places.

Seven years ago, when I wasn't the sunny fellow I am today, I met up with Heather. (On *my* time, which is the way it's been with us, to my regret.) Back then I was in uniform and I had a wife who kicked me in the teeth a lot and otherwise got us into divorce court. I was a wreck from her and it showed on me like boils on a fat lady's neck. Heather took a sisterly pity on me, even though I was a cop posted in the lobby of a midtown hotel where she had booking with a couple of evangelists in the banquet room who were whooping it up for an actor making a speech about how he wanted to play the White House.

"Officer," she'd said, "don't get this wrong, but you sure look like a sap who needs some friendly company." Her voice was low and gorgeous, like one of those lady disc jockeys on midnight jazz shows for bachelors who can't sleep. "What's your name, hon?"

"Hockaday, but they call me Hock."

"I'm Heather, but the johns call me Heat. You call me Heather, okay?"

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"Sure. But how come you make me for just some guy you should sugar off?"

"You mean besides the fact you're wearing the colors?"

"Aw, forget it."

She laughed at me and made me like it.

She sat down at the bar next to me now and ordered a glass of beaujolais while we waited for a table. I heard the bartender sigh.

"The last time I saw you," Heather said, "you looked like some slug who sleeps in the park. Now look at you! You look like you just walked out of a bandbox. You've either got a good lady to dress you, finally, or you're after a promotion."

I looked good because, for one thing, I'd shaved. For another thing, I'd gone to the closet I don't open much. I wore a navy blazer from Paul Stuart, charcoal-grey slacks, and a pearl-grey checked shirt with a mauve tie. Maybe I could make it as a TV cop yet.

"All I need is one little pop," I said, "and you're right, I make detective."

"Congrats, hon." Heather squeezed my arm and the barman and two waiters sighed. Another drinker looked like he might fall off his stool. "That's real nice. The extra pay will be even nicer. You'll be able to afford to get out with the ladies more, like you should. We're very big eaters and drinkers, you know."

"So maybe I'll see more of you?"

"That depends on how you behave yourself. I told you a long time ago, you can call me Heather."

"Yeah, well, just a fugitive thought."

She sipped her wine and laughed privately at something, but I doubt if the guy she was thinking about would have liked it. "Hock, do you have any idea what kind of conversation I get from the men I meet in my line of work? Don't ask. I'd rather talk to you because I have the feeling you're actually listening. Besides, I'm a career criminal and it eases my conscience if once in a while I do a little snitching to help out a nice young defender of the people."

"Thanks for the 'young' part."

"Young and pretty, that's you. When you clean yourself up, anyway. Tell me what kind of ladies you're seeing these days."

"Do you have any idea what kind of conversation a guy like me, teetering around the rim of middle-age, gets on a date? Don't ask. To tell the truth, I'd rather go to the library. Which is what I do now since my Philco gave up on me and I don't go to the movies any more because I can't hear the picture over all the chewing."

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"So what's wrong with the library? They've got librarians, don't they?"

Our table was ready.

When we finished our meal—during which I wasn't my best as a talker or a listener, with my mind way off trying to make sense of a killer and his fortune cards—Heather ordered us coffee and port. When it came, she said, "Well, now, is it time for me to sing for my supper?"

I felt the fortune cards down in the side pocket of my blazer and realized that the killer was giving me as much thought as I was giving him. "Not exactly," I told her. "I need your help with some inside-out thinking. I'm working on something I can crack open only if I figure out the nuances."

"What am I supposed to give you, the woman's view, so-called?"

"Don't knock it. Women have built-in antennae that pick up supersonic nuances. That's what makes the gender so scary."

"I like it," she said. "What are you working on?"

"I'm working on the talk of the town."

Heather shivered like a snake had just run up her ankle. "Oh, God, Hock, this Zero Man thing?" Now I wasn't thinking of this killer as some abstract headline monster. I was thinking of a guy who could calmly dispatch my friend Heather, then laugh himself sick when he read about it in the papers.

"What can *I* tell you, Hock?"

I passed her the fortune cards. "What do you make of these?"

She read each of them carefully, especially the one where he'd written, "Next I get the bitch who made me do it."

"I think they're creepy as hell," Heather said. "Which is the same thing I thought about them when I was a kid."

"You remember them, too?"

"Sure. We used to get them from the gypsy ladies who ran those little tea parlors and palm-reading salons."

"What do you suppose Zero Man means?"

"Off hand, I'd say your guy feels like people have been ripping off big chunks of his flesh for years and he's worried there isn't much left of him any more."

"Oh, thanks. That narrows the field. Now I know I'm looking for your standard-issue, middle-class guy somewhere in his forties. We all feel that way."

"Yeah, well—"

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"I'm sorry for snapping, babe."

"No, don't be. Maybe it's good you should take it a little personal."

I shrugged. "So what does the guy get by offing women?"

"Think personal again. Didn't *you* ever want to kill a woman?"

"Let's just say I went to confession a lot when I was married. I got one good piece of advice from a priest who told me, 'My son, you know what they say about women: you can't live with them and you're not allowed to shoot them.' "

"A rare priest. He's wise to the fact that God's an ironist."

Heather picked up the last fortune card again. She studied the signature in the flowery hand, the angry script below it, and, on the flip side, that vaguely knowing, vaguely disturbing prophecy.

"Let me ask you this," she said. "Any of you clever shamuses ever give a thought to the possibility that Zero Man kills women he doesn't know because, for whatever reason, he hasn't yet killed the woman he really wants to?"

"I'm not sure I follow you."

"I'm only saying that maybe if you concentrated on finding the woman of the piece, then maybe you'd develop a solid lead on your Zero Man."

She looked at the rest of the cards for a second and then, just as she was handing them back to me, she gasped, "Hock, I just flashed on it—where I've seen these creepy things. I mean *now,* not back when I was a kid. In the Hole. You know the Hole?"

Again, she shivered.

And maybe I did, too. Because at that moment I knew exactly how to find Zero Man. And that it was only a matter of time.

The Hole, as it is known by the hustlers and hangers-on, is the principal incubator of street crime in Times Square. What it is, exactly, is the subway arcade at West Forty-second Street and Eighth Avenue, the center point of a midtown netherworld of cheap bars, hotsheet hotels, porno grind houses, and magazine shops that provide a support system for the city's deviant and predatory subcultures—addicts and drug dealers, pederast "hawks" and their teenage boy "chickens," ripoff artists, street alcoholics, bag ladies, former mental patients, and prostitutes of the lowest caste. Slightly outnumbering these subcultures is the assemblage of those who come to watch the passing scene, to make a subconscious bet on their lives.

I know of noplace in New York more hellishly forbidding, noplace

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more stygian, than the Hole. The entrance is a dark and narrow enclosed stairway from Forty-second Street, just past an alcove newsstand where giggling tourists buy smutty magazines and dead-eyed junkies short on cash for a proper fix can purchase a dozen chocolate bars thoughtfully bagged and slightly discounted for quantity sale. The steps are slimy and stink of urine. And always, there is madding sound: the rasp of suffering voices, the racing feet you do not care to turn and see, the eerie laughter of children from the nearby welfare hotels, the screaming trains and the incoherent announcements blasted over the subway loudspeakers, the angry music of gigantic box radios perched on the shoulders of diminutive young men with leather wristbands, the occasional thud of blunt objects on bone and flesh.

The curious from many miles around come here to watch the city hemorrhage. They return to their homes and delude themselves by imagining that the bleeding has nothing to do with where they live.

At the bottom of the stairway, there is often a small old woman in a black nun's habit who sits in a folding chair with a bowl in her lap. She explains to anyone who cares to speak to her that she is part of an order that begs from the public in order to do charitable good for the world. She is a fake.

Just beyond the fake nun, there is a large video-games parlor. It is a room filled with the electronic bloops of meaningless contest, the constant ring of quarters pushed into slots over and over again. A man with a badly misshapen face and a carpenter's apron patrols the place, making change with the customers from the stash of coins around his big belly and making sure everyone notices the pistol strapped to his belt.

The customers in the place are all ages, but mostly men under thirty. Rarely is there a female in the parlor. In recent years, women seem to have known better just by looking at these men. Illiterate, blank-faced, probably psychotic, some are brain-damaged from disease or childhood accident or assault. They are nothing and nobody, and will never be anything or anybody. More of them come every year to this dangerous male turf, which is bursting at the walls with more and more video-game machines. In the year 1986 in the most important city in the world in the richest nation on the earth, video games are a growth industry.

I became one of the customers the day after my dinner with Heather, and for eight days I waited for Zero Man to make his move, as I knew he would. Eight days of spending the city's money a

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quarter at a time, eight days in the large raucous room full of defeated men being defeated by machines.

I didn't stray much from the sight of the single machine that didn't belong, the place Heather remembered—as did I—where the fortune cards of our youth could still be bought. And still for five cents.

It was a large vertical box. It looked like a ticket booth that some of the old Broadway movie houses still have under the marquee, where dour ladies sit on straightback chairs and sell tickets behind a thick glass window. In this particular box, there was a mannequin of a gypsy woman wearing a red speckled bandana. Her plaster hands moved slowly back and forth above a small ledge behind the glass. Spread out across the ledge were the twenty-two cards of the Romany *tarok* deck—a single joker with a split, serpentine tongue and twenty-one other cards, illustrating the vices and virtues of mankind and the elemental forces of nature.

In eight days, only one other man besides me put a nickel into the gypsy's coin slot. When he did, I moved slowly and carefully toward him. Under my big grungy overcoat, I had a .44 Charter Arms Bulldog in a shoulder holster. My .32 automatic Beretta Puma was strapped to my inside left ankle. I packed handcuffs and shackles in a specially built pocket of my coat lining. I knew I wouldn't need any of it. But I did press the radio signal looped over my belt. I pressed once to notify the blue-and-white up on the street that I'd spotted Zero Man and that they should stand by to notify the other back-up units in the vicinity to pour into the Hole if I pressed the signal a second time.

If I knew Tommy Neglio, though, the cops up on the street would have separate instructions to immediately call in to Central Detective Command. And then Neglio would immediately have his duty sergeant call the mayor's office and the mayor would then have his flunkies notify everybody and his brother in the press. The image of a circus going up filled my mind. And I figured that no matter what I wanted, I would have only a few minutes with Zero Man before he'd be taken off and sweated.

"Say, friendly," I said to him, "it seems you and me are the only guys interested in this old girl."

He turned to me, a little scared. He held one of the fortune cards the gypsy booth had dispensed. His hands trembled. His eyes were blue and watery, his face mottled red and purple from years of eating junk food. His right cheek and the right side of his neck had been

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rebuilt with plastic surgery, and whoever did it had been sloppy, leaving the patient misshapen.

"Yeah," he said, "I seen you play her once. You get yourself anything good?"

"Well, I don't know. The messages are a little hard to follow, don't you think? I mean, half the time I don't know what the hell you're supposed to do about the message. Do you?"

He jingled the change in his carpenter's apron and his hand moved in the direction of his pistol. "It ain't so hard to understand for some."

"How come you keep her here, anyway? Nobody's playing it."

"You ain't regular here, are you?"

"Naw," I said. "I'm just between times, you know? Just killing time."

"Yeah, I thought you weren't regular."

"You didn't answer me. How come you keep the gypsy?"

He looked down at the floor, then at the fortune card he held. "You're a cop, ain't you?"

"Hey, now that you spilled that, I have to give you the warning," I said.

"Shoot."

I told him his rights under the Miranda law, his right to counsel and his right to remain silent and the fact that anything he said to me from now on could be used against him in court. And I told him he was under arrest as a suspect in a series of murders. He looked at the floor while he took the pistol out of his belt and gave it to me.

"How come you keep the gypsy?" I asked again.

"She was my first attraction here. That was a long time ago, when the city was a different place, you know? Not like it is now, so sick and so dangerous. Do you know that everybody walked through this arcade? I mean good people. Show people, for God's sake! There was a time when every night after a show she was doing at the St. James, Eve Arden would come down here along with her showgirl friends and play my attractions. It's true—they'd play the attractions. And then they'd go back up to the street and walk off someplace to dinner. It was that safe."

He looked around the parlor. The defeated men played on, oblivious, pushing more and more quarters into Zero Man's machines.

"So safe," he said. "My wife would come down here to meet me after I'd finished up nights. We'd walk across Forty-second on a

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summer night back to the East Side, then uptown to our apartment. Can you imagine?"

"I remember."

"Look now!" He waved his arms. "All of them killers!"

He put his hand up to his scarred face and neck. "You want to know how I got this? I fought off the animal that knifed my wife, that's how. He killed her and now he's going to be paroled. He's going to be set free for murdering my wife, for making me ugly. What does that make me then, huh?"

"It makes you Zero Man."

"Ah, yes—you can see that."

"But you yourself killed those women. Tell me why."

"You don't see that, too?"

"No," I said, and pressed the radio signal on my belt a second time.

"I'm taking the women away from him. He's not going to get to kill them." He tapped the glass of the gypsy booth. "She told me to. She told me!"

"But she was wrong, wasn't she?"

He began sobbing. "Yes, she was."

The parlor filled up with uniformed policemen. The video-game players looked up, their mouths hanging open in what resembled human curiosity.

"She's the bitch you wrote about, isn't she?"

"Yes, yes."

I turned him so that he faced the gypsy woman behind the glass, then I raised his right arm and put his pistol into it. "Go ahead," I told him. And he fired once, then again, splitting the plaster head of the gypsy and shorting out the electric motor that powered her hands.

Four or five uniforms took over from me. I told them I'd given him the Miranda. They bound his arms back and took him out of the parlor and up to the street. The video-game players returned to their play. The reality was over.

I was still there when Inspector Neglio arrived.

"How's it going upstairs?" I asked him.

"We got Zero Man, God's in His heaven, and the mayor's giving a street-side press conference." He reached into a side pocket of his trenchcoat, pulled out a detective's gold shield in a grainy leather case, and handed it to me. "Here you go, Hock. I thought I'd take the privilege of giving you this personal, you know?"

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a *NEW* short story by

GEORGE BAXT

Hugo Ullmer was Mark Campi's agent. "Hugo, tell them I'll rewrite," pleaded Mark. "Tell them I'll do anything, including floors and windows. Hugo, I am not merely broke, I am poverty-stricken. I am a disaster area. I reek of failure. The smell causes women to scream and strong men to faint. Toy poodles chase me down the street nipping at my heels! I'm a desperate man!"

"Question, Mark."

"Yes?"

"Have you ever thought of going into another line of work?"

Another campy (get it?) tale from George Baxt, ingenious to the very last line. George's latest novel, The Alfred Hitchcock Murder Case, *from St. Martin's Press, is already in its second printing and International Polygonics has just released in paperback his* A Parade of Cockeyed Creatures, The Dorothy Parker Murder Case, *and the first two novels in the Pharoah Love trilogy,* A Queer Kind of Death *and* Swing Low, Sweet Harriet, *with the third,* Topsy and Evil, *due soon . . .*

QUESTION MARK

by *GEORGE BAXT*

"This is too much for a man my age!" shouted Mark Campi into the telephone, the recipient of the complaint at the other end being his patient literary agent, Hugo Ullmer. Hugo had just told Mark his latest television script, *Washington: Man, Politician, and Lover*, was unacceptable to the producers of "History Today" because in the long sequence involving the crossing of the Delaware he had

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Washington getting seasick. "So he doesn't get seasick!" yelled Mark.

Hugo Ullmer was a patient and understanding man, qualities rarely found in agents in quantities larger than ten percent. Hugo had been around for years. He had been agent to Mark's father, the celebrated Carlos Campi, whose Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *The Misunderstood Martyr,* about John Wilkes Booth, still caused controversy and was banned in numerous libraries across the country, including Alaska. Interestingly enough, the senior Campi's dying words were, "This is too much!" as he was blown out of a jetliner by a terrorist bomb—some say placed there by his son, who hated living in the shadow of his father's genius.

"Hugo, tell them I'll rewrite," pleaded Mark. "Tell them I'll do anything, including floors and windows. Hugo, I am not merely broke, I am poverty-stricken. I am a disaster area. I reek of failure. The smell causes women to scream and strong men to faint. Toy poodles chase me down the street nipping at my heels! I'm a desperate man!"

"Question, Mark."

"Yes?"

"Have you ever thought of going into another line of work?"

Mark's eyes narrowed. "Like what? I haven't the discernment to be a mugger."

"Have you thought of maybe driving a taxi—"

"I'm a very bad driver."

"Or selling women's wear at Bloomingdale's—"

"You know I can't deal with women." Mark paused. "Are you telling me you no longer wish to represent me?"

"Frankly, Mark, in the past three years, since you've run through your inheritance—"

"Inheritance!" Mark shouted. "You call one hundred thousand dollars an inheritance from a man who earned millions! Millions! You told me yourself he earned millions!"

"I know, Mark. But there were so many wives and girl friends, and so many children, especially the illegitimate ones."

"*They* had good lawyers!"

"Well, I told you to get rid of yours. E. Finsteren Yurr was never to be trusted, he's such a celebrity hound. But let's get back to you." He sounded as though there had been a brief pause for commercials. "In the past three years, you have written numerous scripts and I haven't been able to sell one. Not *one.*"

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"*You* said you liked them!"

"And I did, in a manner of speaking."

"Meaning?"

"Well, quite honestly, they were just as rotten as anything else you see on the tube today. I thought surely I'd sell some of them. Especially the dreck you wrote on spec. Hey, rhymes, doesn't it, like the rain in Spain but of course not as good. Those scripts you tried for *Dynasty* and *Fall Guy* and all the others were in my opinion surely no worse and certainly just as bad as the ones they've bought. You've just never been able to get on a roll like so many other mediocrities in the business. I'm really sorry, Mark, but quite honestly I've been wanting to say this to you for months. I hate hurting your feelings. After all, you're Carlos's boy and I made a lot of money on your father."

"Could you possibly lend me some of it?"

Hugo went silent and then said, "You're into me for several thou as it is."

"I'm tax-deductible."

Hugo stared out the window of his lavish suite in the newest high rise on West Fifty-seventh Street at the hotel across the street, where through his binoculars he could see a man and woman performing the unthinkable. "Ahhhh," he murmured.

Mark blinked his eyes rapidly. "Does that mean you'll send me a check?"

Hugo lowered the binoculars and glared at the receiver in his other hand. When he spoke, his voice was unusually harsh for one so patient and understanding. "I'll send you a couple of hundred, and that's the last of it—get it, boyo?"

"And you'll no longer represent me?"

"Another question, Mark."

"Go ahead."

"You know how old I am."

"Yes."

"How old *am* I?"

"You forgot?"

"No, I just want to hear it from your lips."

"You're eighty-six years old."

"Correct. How many more years do you think I might have left?"

"I don't know. I hope it's a lot."

"I do, too. But the odds being what they are what with my hardening arteries, my diabetes, and Ronald Reagan, my chances are

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pretty slim. So whatever time I've got left, I want to try and enjoy in peace and quiet and without submitting any more scripts of yours to unsympathetic television producers. Mark, keep in touch. You're almost like my own son."

"You turned him in to the police."

"Must you always dramatize? Keep in touch, but stop writing. Try to meet and marry a rich dentist's daughter."

Ten minutes later, Mark stood staring out the window of his apartment, a co-op owned by his aunt, a selfish alcoholic who wrote poison-pen letters to TV anchorwomen. He was five months behind in the upkeep he owed her, but fortunately, being almost always in a complete state of lethe, she forgot to phone him in the middle of the night and threaten him the way she used to do every Thanksgiving and Christmas when she knew being an orphan depressed him. (His mother had died in childbirth, with, he heard from a nurse who had been in attendance, a blissful sigh of relief.)

Tears of self-pity were beginning to blind him and he dabbed at his eyes with one end of a window drape. It was a grim, dull, overcast day as only grim, dull, overcast days can be in New York City when they're grim, dull, and overcast. He couldn't hate Hugo Ullmer because, face it, Hugo had stuck by him above and beyond the call of duty. He couldn't hate his father because a one-hundred-thousand-dollars inheritance was better than no inheritance at all. He couldn't hate the friends he no longer had because his impatience and anger with himself had somehow gotten misdirected at them and so most of the old bunch had abandoned him, leaving him just three or four who stuck by him because they rarely saw him. (He no longer had the money to pick up their tabs.)

Hugo would send him a couple of hundred, and after that was gone, then what? He'd have to look for a job. Any job. But what was he qualified to do? He'd been a dreadful student in college and was trained to do nothing except envy his father's genius and try to emulate it. Carlos had encouraged his son because no one had ever encouraged Carlos. He was brought to America from Spain when a lad of eight and encouraged only to go out on the streets and shine shoes or sell newspapers and steal women's handbags to support a mother who told fortunes and a father who spent her income on prostitutes and movie usherettes (he especially favored those who worked the back of the balcony). Carlos was self-taught and it was from his childhood misfortunes that the first one-act plays took form.

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When Hugo found him at an off-off-Broadway theater—"Any farther off," Hugo had told Mark, "and you'd have heard a splash."—he was only eighteen years old, but a budding genius. The rest is history and there's no time for it here.

Mark's stream of self-pity was damned by a familiar voice in the hall, a voice so shrill, so piercing, so detestable as to cause the blood to run boiling to his head—to cause him to run to the door, open it, and scream at Mrs. Eunice Green. She gaped at him from her open doorway, where she was discoursing with another woman, Miss Letitia Dipp, who worked for her.

Letitia Dipp appreciated Mark's tirades. He was quite right to complain. Eunice Green was a strong-minded monstrosity, a person who thought any location was her personal arena and enjoyed standing in the doorway giving last-minute orders and reminders to Letitia at the top of her powerful lungs. Mrs. Green was a cooking expert who held classes in her apartment (which was against the law as this co-op was not zoned for the conducting of businesses of any sort), and when her voice wasn't polluting the hallway the smell of her cooking was.

"How many times do you have to be told to conduct your affairs within the confines of your own damned apartment instead of at the top of your lungs in the hallway? How many times do you have to remind her to make sure the broccoli buds are crisp? Close your damned door or I'll close it for you!"

Mrs. Green's hands were on her hips with defiance. "Is that a threat?"

"You heard me!"

"And so did Miss Dipp hear you! You heard him—right, Letitia?" Miss Dipp examined a cuticle, saying nothing. "You have been warned before by the police to stop threatening me!"

"They've also told you to stay out of the hall except when heading to or from the elevator! It's bad enough one has to endure the terrible smell of your cooking—"

"How dare you! Nobody else complains about my cooking—not another tenant on this floor ever complains!"

"That's because they're lucky. They're lacking in their olfactory senses!" He slammed the door shut and leaned against it, gasping for breath. Close encounters of this kind always exhausted him, and what was worse they made him hungry. He embarrassedly had to admit to himself that in the past three years of his failure to sell his scripts, he had taken to gourmandizing. He ate and ate and ate and

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was now just a few pounds from being declared legally obese. And when he was honest and admitted it to himself, the smell of Eunice Green's cooking made him hungry. With a sob of despair, he flung himself face downward on the couch and entertained himself with his favorite fantasy, murdering Eunice Green.

An hour later, when Letitia Dipp returned from shopping, toting a bag of viands in each hand, she found Eunice Green at the kitchen counter, sniffing greedily at a pot of steaming food. "I concocted this while you were out. It was an inspiration out of the blue. I just had to try it and see if it would work."

"It certainly smells—terrific." Letitia had almost said "strange." The contents of the pot looked like molten lava dotted with clumps of clay. "What is it?"

"I've called it Veal Meat Again!" She seemed to await a thunderclap, but none was forthcoming. "Two pounds of veal cut into strips, sauteed two minutes on each side in butter, pepper, and paprika. Lay the strips in the pot with small button mushrooms, tiny potatoes, and onions. Stir in two cups of heavy cream, one cup of vermouth, let simmer in the oven for half an hour at four hundred degrees, and voila! Sit down, Letitia, I'm going to serve it to us both right now. Ideally, it should be served on a bed of rice or kasha—" or a bed of pain, thought Letitia "—but there's no time for that now. Oh, do put those bags down, I'm sure they're frightfully heavy, which is why you have such a pained expression on your face."

While Eunice dished out her new creation onto two plates, Letitia emptied the perishables she had purchased into one of the apartment's four refrigerators. (There were six ovens, usually going full blast, reminding Letitia of the smelteries in her native Pittsburgh.) Eunice was one of those small, slender women who could eat forever without gaining an ounce. Not so Letitia, whose constant battle of the bulge had driven her to nymphomania as an added form of exercise.

"Not bad," exulted Eunice after her first forkful, "not bad at all! Let's freeze the rest and save it for tomorrow's class. I'll try it out on them, and if the majority approve, the recipe goes into my new book on Southern cooking, which I'm thinking of titling *Puttin' On the Grits*. How do you like it?"

"Love it," replied a grim-faced Letitia.

Across the hall, Mark now lay prone on the floor sniffing the floor

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polish, anything to keep himself from being tortured by the strange, weird, offbeat odor of Veal Meat Again. I'll kill her, he told himself. I'll kill that woman. Somehow, sometime I'll get her. But it must be the perfect crime. Everybody on the floor knows I hate her, especially Letitia Dipp.

Mark, though, often got the feeling Letitia Dipp sympathized with his detestation of Eunice Green. Sometimes he thought of Letitia as an indentured bondswoman. He could see that she, too, tended toward obesity. He wondered if she ever fantasized that she and Mark might somehow get together romantically and spend the rest of their lives watching their waists expand. He sat up and stared at the door, scrubbing Letitia Dipp from his thoughts and martialing all his efforts of concentration on murdering Eunice Green.

I must be mad!

His brow and upper lip were moist with perspiration. Murder? Murder Eunice Green? Murder that shrill, obnoxious, egomaniacal— How could he possibly entertain thoughts of committing a deed so foul and noxious and beneath contempt?

It was easy.

Question, Mark. How do you go about it? Answer. You play it by ear. You're patient. You wait for your opportunity to present itself. By being alert and wakeful, the moment will present itself when you least expect it. Then you must be prepared to grab that moment by the throat and throttle Eunice Green to death.

Briefly, he entertained the idea of somehow clandestinely getting into her apartment when she and Letitia were out and poisoning everything poisonable in her refrigerators. (He knew there were four because the janitor told him.) But with all the eating going on there by her pupils, that could make him a mass murderer and he wasn't interested in overkill. He'd wait. He'd bide his time. Sooner or later the wheel of fortune had to click in his favor. It had to. The fates couldn't be this unkind to him. God knew that where unkindness was concerned, the muses had taken up the slack.

That night, he decided to treat himself to a movie and a luscious Chinese dinner. It was after midnight when he returned to his building. The part-time doorman was not on duty. He always left at midnight. In his wake, he always left a sign on the door, "Close this with your key! Do not permit strangers!"

A familiar figure was staggering ahead of him on the street. She was using the buildings to prop herself up as well as guide herself

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home. Her mink coat was slung about her shoulders like a cape. Her handbag hung listlessly from her left hand. Mark slowed his pace. He waited until she reached the door of their building and fumbled in her handbag for her keys. Nonchalantly, with his key-ring in his hand, he approached her and said quite gently, "Permit me."

She said something that sounded like "Hafoof."

He opened the door and guided her inside. She staggered to the second door and leaned against it while he closed the first door with his key. As he nudged her gently to one side so he could unlock the second door, she said something that sounded like "Garump." When he eventually got her into the elevator, she was slumped against him and he firmly propped her up. They almost looked like a reunion of former lovers.

Helping her into the hall when the elevator reached their floor, Mark steered her to her apartment door. He took her keys from her handbag, opened the door, and gently nudged her in. The drapes were already drawn, so it was safe to turn on the lights. Eunice slipped quietly to the floor, snoring softly, the mink coat under her. Mark placed her handbag on the floor next to her and then quietly went from room to room to make sure there was no one else in the apartment. Then he returned to Eunice, looked down at her with loathing, took a pillow from the sofa, and in ten minutes or less Eunice Green was dead of suffocation.

The phone rang and Mark almost screamed. Then he heard Eunice Green's ghastly, ghostly voice. "Hi, there—this is Eunice Green. I can't take your call now but if you'll leave your name, your number, and a brief message, I'll get back to you as soon as I can. Now don't be in a hurry—you have to wait for the beep." Mark heard the beep and somebody slammed their receiver down, as Mark himself usually did when encountering a recorded message.

Mark spent the next fifteen minutes ransacking the apartment. With many thanks to the deity who now seemed to be smiling upon him at last, he found over a thousand dollars in cash in several envelopes (destined for a safe-deposit box or boxes, Mark decided, to avoid paying taxes on it). Next he found several boxes of junk jewelry, which he scattered on the floor so the police would guess this was the work of an angry and frustrated burglar. He made a mess of the place, going so far as to slash her mattress and pillow slips with a steak knife from the kitchen cutlery. He even removed the cover of the toilet tank to prove he was a thorough thief (and murderer)—and couldn't believe what he found there. In an oilskin

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pouch, there were several fine pieces of jewelry. Oh, happy day! After a safe period of time, he could fly to some distant city, pawn them there, and use the cash to move to Europe, where he had always dreamed of living.

What a fruitful night it had been! Eunice Green dead and newfound wealth in his hand. Now he was hungry. Unusual activity always made him feel a bit peckish. He raided the freezer in one refrigerator and, after first taking caution there was no one in the hall, transported the bounty to his own, leaving Eunice's door ajar as further evidence of an intruder.

Then another idea jolted him. Cautiously, he left his apartment with his keys and went to the lobby, which fortunately was empty. He unlocked both doors and left them unlocked. Minutes later, he was safely back in his apartment preparing a liverwurst and cheese sandwich and humming under his breath.

For the first time in three years, he was at peace and content.

The next morning, Letitia Dipp found Eunice's body and screamed. Mark had left the building early, purposely not to be around when Letitia arrived. He was in the corner Blimpie having breakfast and reading the *Times* want ads, so that if anyone saw him they might conclude he was looking for a job. When he returned to his apartment carrying some groceries, the building was swarming with police. The janitor was in the lobby and told him of Eunice Green's tragic murder. There were others in the lobby who knew Mark loathed the woman and he said, quite suavely, in a voice he hoped might put them in mind of the late Clifton Webb, "Propriety of course prompts me to cluck my tongue in sympathy, but honesty prompts me to do a time step."

In the apartment, after putting away the groceries, he set about dusting and vacuuming. He knew the police would soon be questioning him and he was prepared for them. The jewels were safely hidden in a can of mothballs and the cash he had spent a good part of the early morning slipping between the pages of his many books. Nobody ever thought of looking for cash there, or at least he never did.

By noontime, he was exhausted, positive he had worked off thousands of calories, and felt deserving of a very good, very rich lunch. He poured himself an aperitif and took it to the kitchen.

In Eunice Green's apartment, Letitia Dipp was going through the tedious process of trying to assess what had been stolen, because the

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police were now quite sure an intruder had murdered Eunice when she entered the apartment, thoroughly inebriated and an innocent prey. A tenant told the police he had found the downstairs doors unlocked the night before, so that proved a strange, deadly intruder had invaded the premises. Why did the intruder choose Eunice Green's apartment? Possibly because, in her drunken state, he followed her in the street and entered the building with her. Letitia had to admit that when she was drunk—and sometimes when she was not drunk—dear old Eunice was given to picking up strange men and returning to her apartment with them. Police were now out questioning the neighborhood bartenders.

"Oh," moaned Letitia as she stared at Eunice's body, which was now covered by a sheet, "must they leave her lying there like that?" The detective in charge, Lew Dougherty, made sympathetic noises. Then he noticed the strange look on Letitia's face and the way she was sniffing the air. He suggested she turn on the air-conditioner.

"In the dead of winter? Why?"

"To get rid of the smell."

"The smell's coming from the hallway." Letitia went to the door and opened it. She sniffed again. "Oh, my God!" She ran to a refrigerator and opened the freezer compartment. "It's gone!"

"What's gone?"

"Veal Meat Again!"

"Oh, I hope so," said Dougherty with a pleasant smile, he also having an exotic taste for chubby ladies. "After the current unpleasantness maybe we can get together for a drink and some Tandoori."

"You don't understand! It was Eunice's latest culinary creation, for people who are bored with veal. She cooked it yesterday and she and I ate some, then she stored the rest of it in the freezer, intending to serve it to her cooking class today."

Dougherty said with astonishment, "You mean the murderer must have stolen it?"

"And is preparing it for lunch. That's what I smell! It's so distinctive!" She crossed back to the outer door, and with tears in her eyes stared at the door to Mark's apartment. "Detective Dougherty," she said, pointing to Mark's door, "the odor is coming from that apartment. The man who lives there, Mark Campi, hated Eunice." She could feel her shoulders sagging. She liked Mark Campi, she truly liked him, and she hated the sound of her own voice when she said to the detective, "I think you'd better question Mark."

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THE JURY BOX
by ALLEN J. HUBIN

Donald E. Westlake has abandoned two of his earlier voices but they are well worth searching out. As "Tucker Coe" (1966–1972) he published five finely tuned explorations of the consequences of guilt in the mind and emotions of a (former) New York City detective. As "Richard Stark" (1962–1974) he offered 20 expertly crafted views of the grim world of the professional criminal, primarily featuring a holdup artist named Parker.

Under his own name he has been issuing mostly comic crime fiction since 1960. The best of these, in my judgment, is a series, beginning in 1970 with "The Hot Rock," about a thief named John Dortmunder whose schemes go awry in cosmically daffy ways. The latest—and sixth—of these is *Good Behavior* (Mysterious Press, $15.95). Here he's been commissioned to steal some Manhattan caviar, but his partner proves inept in several respects, and while escaping an energetic policeman Dortmunder falls through the roof of a convent. Given haven by the Silent Sisterhood of St. Filumena, he finds himself agreeing to rescue one of their number. Sister Mary Grace has been kidnaped by her father, one of the world's nastiest and wealthiest men, to be deprogrammed of her earnest Catholicism on the top floor of said father's skyscraper, one of the world's most secure buildings. The things that Dortmunder and his amazing colleagues get into! Endlessly amusing and inventive, this one.

The Woman in the Moon (Doubleday, $12.95), the debut of British poet and essayist Donald Lehmkuhl, is a tantalizing tale, with much fresh and satiric use of language. Zena Baird, feminist, writes an advice column in *Eve*, a women's monthly. But writing is going poorly, her marriage to Simon, an incompetent musician whose income never appears, is going even less well, and the headmaster at her ten-year-old son's school recommends psychological counseling for the child. Then an American nymphomaniac comes to challenge Zena's job and strangled women begin to turn up in Zena's London neighborhood. Could this get worse? Of course: a muscle-headed policeman could suspect Zena of being the killer.

Private eyes certainly seem to be thick enough on the fictional ground already, but Edward Gorman offers quite an agreeable addition to the pack in Jack Dwyer, former cop, sometimes actor, security guard, and shamus. Gorman is an advertising executive in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Dwyer operates out of an unnamed midwestern city we could call Cedar Rapids. In *Murder Straight Up* (St. Martin's, $14.95), Channel 3's news team is a trifle disconcerted by the on-the-air murder of its lead newscaster.

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Dwyer was security-guarding the studio at the time and let a prowler get in and out unsnared. This does not endear Jack to anyone, so he goes looking for the killer to preserve his pride and employability. Along the way we meet an interesting if largely unlikable array of news folk—Gorman seems to take a dim view of TV newscasting—and observe Dwyer's efforts to sort out his romantic affairs (he's divorced, of course, and bedding here and there). Welcome, Jack Dwyer.

I should also mention the one earlier Dwyer story, equally good if not even better: *New Improved Murder* (St. Martin's, $12.95). Here Jane Brannigan, a former Dwyer lover now married to an advertising superstar, seems to have put a gun to said superstar and pulled the trigger. Dwyer doesn't believe she did it and stirs the cesspool known as the Hammond Advertising Agency. All sorts of foul things bubble to the surface and Jack well sorts it out in the end.

Witty and replete with striking characters is *Red Herrings* (Doubleday, $12.95), the eighth of Tim Heald's novels about Simon Bognor, investigator for the British Board of Trade. Bognor and wife Monica are here in the village of Herring St. George, staying with Peregrine and Samantha Contractor. Peregrine has made an indecently large fortune out of mail-order lingerie; some Bognorian suspicion attaches to this achievement. But those doubts are rather overwhelmed by the unintended product of the village fete: one body, very dead. The deceased was a tax inspector, and Simon's subsequent inquiry involves turning over the uncommonly large array of village rocks. Good work.

Tim Simpson, the art-investment expert who works for a maverick London banker, appears for the third time in *The Gwen John Sculpture* by John Malcolm (Scribners, $13.95). A letter arrives at the bank offering a previously unknown Rodin sculpture of the artist's mistress, Gwen John. Meanwhile, turmoil and a small patch of madness seem to have descended upon banking matters, engulfing Tim and the maverick, and Tim has managed his love life into oblivion. He travels to France in search of the Rodin, finding instead deadly violence. All this is very engagingly narrated, with humor and highly satisfying resolution.

Robert B. Parker's 13th Spenser novel is *Taming a Sea-Horse* (Delacorte, $15.95). This is a relatively short tale, padded with margins to look longer, and it's also relatively short on credible plot—Spenser himself remarks on this. April Kyle, a hooker whom Spenser "rescued" ten years ago (in *Ceremony*) and lodged in a "well managed" brothel in New York, has strayed again. Spenser tracks her down, but she's a willing captive, in "love" with an unlovable chap who proves to be an entreprenuerial pimp. Spenser's asking questions provokes surprising homicidal tendencies and back to Boston he goes to ask quesitons of dangerous men. All this is quickly readable, and at least none of the corpses is provided by Spenser.

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From Thomas Adcock

"Meaning no disrespect to my esteemed colleague Clark Howard, most of your Texans have this irritating habit of yammering on into the purple dawn how they know absolutely everything there is to know about cooking chili. Well, they're full of jalapeños, which is something your Texans eat just constantly and which goes a long way toward explaining all the hot air. (You won't find so much jalapeño in my recipe for chili. I believe in heat and flavor, all right, but I just don't see any particular need to be a cowboy about it.) The truth is, the finest bowl of chili you'll ever know—and I'm talking chili that gives you life through a cold winter day's writing—is chock full of ingredients from New York's Lower East Side.

"Ideally, all ingredients should actually be picked up in the salumarias, bodegas, agoras, and delicatessens of the Lower East Side, which is a fine Manhattan neighborhood still free of quiche blight. Deprived outlanders will have to make substitutions as best they can at supermarkets and the ilk. Ersatz Lower East Side Chili is better than none at all.

"As they say on Delancey Street, leave us discuss the cooking vessel before we begin. It must be old and iron and eight quarts or thereabouts—the sort of thing you inherited from a great-granny or bought in a second-hand place. Age and iron and a good brisk precook rubbing with salt and olive oil will give the proper contextual character for what follows.

"And a note on two of the listed ingredients—kosher dill pickles and Mexican beer (I recommend Superior brand). These are items I eat and drink, respectively, during the chili preparation, when I'm standing at my chopping block getting it all together and listening to Charlie Parker or Ella or the Duke on WBGO-FM from Newark and it's snowing outside."

LOWER EAST SIDE CHILI

3½ lbs. nicely marbled hunks of stewing beef
4 cans (28 oz. each) imported Italian peeled tomatoes
3 bottles (12 oz. each) Mexican beer
3 chilled kosher dill pickles (unsliced)

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3 gigantic Bermuda onions
1 quart fresh mushrooms
1 pint black olives (pitted, obviously)
1 pint green olives (ditto)
2 big green peppers
2 big red peppers
1½ cups jalapeños
1 jar (12 oz.) baby onions
salt
½ cup dry mustard
3 bay leaves
2 tbsp. sugar
fresh ground black Szechuan peppercorns
plenty of fresh chili powder
plenty of fresh cumin
basil
cayenne pepper
butter
olive oil

After seasoning your pot with salt and olive oil, open up the cans of peeled tomatoes and dump the full contents into it and set a low heat to start gently reducing the tomatoes to a nice, thick liquid. Meanwhile, hack up the stewing beef into shreds and chunks as you so desire and brown thoroughly in a covered iron skillet in butter and olive oil.

Open up your first bottle of Mexican beer. Take a bite of your first kosher dill and wash it down with some beer.

Ease in dry mustard to your heating tomatoes with a wooden spoon. Cut up the Bermuda onions, pausing every so often to drink some beer and crunch a dill. Also, slice up your olives, mushrooms, and peppers.

Your tomato goop should be showing bubbly little peaks by now, which is the signal to drop in the bay leaves and the sugar and two or three generous dashes of salt. Stir with a wooden spoon. Then dump in the sliced-up Bermuda onions. Also, slice up the jalapeños and dump them in. Turn up the flame and bring it all toward a boil.

By now you should be ready to open up your second beer, so go ahead. And have another pickle.

Freshed, start grinding your pepper mill over the boiling goop so that you cover the top in black. Stir with wooden spoon. Now dump in your red and green peppers and the bottle of baby onions.

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Now for the rest of the spices. It's all personal taste. Dump in lots of chili powder first, like maybe half a cup. Then three or four tablespoons of cumin. Then a generous sprinkling of ground basil. And finally a sprinkling of cayenne pepper, remembering that a little of this stuff goes a long way and that it's impossible to remove once you let fly with it. Allow all of this to percolate a while at high heat, then back down the heat and simmer, stirring frequently and taking pulls off the beer bottle with equal frequency. Keep tasting the broth, adding whatever of these spices you wish to match your palate. Myself, I'm heavy-handed with the chili powder, nearly heavy-handed with the cumin, and I gradually—very gradually—heat it up with the cayenne pepper.

Maybe you have about a half bottle of beer left from your second round. Dump this into the goop. It can't hurt. And give the pepper mill another go-round.

Now you're ready to add the beef, once you drain off the fat and oils. Work it into the goop with your wooden spoon. Then dump in your sliced mushrooms and your black and green olives. Work these in, too. Leave pot uncovered, on a simmer.

Go sit down and listen to some jazz and open up your third beer and have another pickle. Every so often, get up and taste your Lower East Side Chili and add this and that spice, as you please.

Catch up on some correspondence. This should take you an hour or so. Read for a while, or write, and otherwise let half a day go by.

Turn off heat and let your chili settle until it's cold. Take out bay leaves and dispose. Go out to the deli for some more beer and over to the patisserie for a baguette. Turn up heat under chili and kill a little time on the telephone by reading your best lines to a forebearing friend. Then have yourself a nice big bowl, with hunks of crusty French bread.

Leave the rest of it right in the pot on top of the stove overnight. It's even better the next day.

From James Powell

"The heart of Anglophone Canadian cuisine is Shepherd's Pie, which is a kind of Moussaka without the eggplant and with mashed potatoes instead of bechamel sauce. However, when Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police starts finding it hard to button his tunic, his wife Mavis serves this diet meatloaf."

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SCARLET TUNIC MEATLOAF

½ cup chopped onion
2 tbsp. butter or margarine
½ cup shredded carrot
½ cup shredded raw potato
2 ½ cups peeled, trimmed, and shredded eggplant
2 cloves sliced garlic
2 lbs. meatloaf mixture (beef, veal, and pork)
2 eggs
1 cup peeled and finely diced tomato
1 ½ cups fine dry bread crumbs
3 tsp. salt
½ tsp. ground cinnamon
¼ tsp. pepper
4 tbsp. lemon juice
2 tbsp. sugar

Saute onion in butter for 3 minutes. Stir in carrot, potato, eggplant, and garlic, tossing to coat well. Cover. Cook 5 minutes.

Combine meatloaf mixture, eggs, tomato, bread crumbs, salt, cinnamon, pepper, 2 tbsp. of the lemon juice, and the cooked vegetables. Turn out onto a lightly greased shallow baking pan and shape firmly.

Bake in a preheated 350° F. oven for 45 minutes. Mix remaining 2 tbsp. lemon juice and sugar in a cup. Brush over loaf. Continue to bake 15 minutes longer, or until brown and glazed.

(Since Mavis will not allow catsup in the house, Bullock must eat this accompanied by tomato sauce. However, he is rewarded with a butter tart for dessert. This is a kind of Canadian pecan pie without the pecans or a shoo-fly pie without the flies.)

From Donald Olson

KALDOLMAR (STUFFED CABBAGE)

1 cabbage
½ cup rice
1 onion
butter
2 lbs. ground beef

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2 eggs
salt
pepper
brown sugar or molasses

Boil whole cabbage as is about 20 minutes. Cool. Separate leaves gently and remove thick veins.

Boil rice in a quart of water for 20 minutes. Rinse under cold water and drain.

Mince onion and brown in butter. Now mix together onion, rice, ground beef, eggs, 2 cups of water, a little salt (1 or 2 tsps.), and pepper to a spongy bulk with a wooden spoon.

Place a large tablespoon of the mixture on each of the larger cabbage leaves and make a neat little package of each one. Tie with thread or secure with toothpicks.

Place the rolls in deep baking tin. Sprinkle with brown sugar or brush with molasses. (I suggest brown sugar.) Bake, or rather brown, in 475°F. oven, turning rolls frequently to avoid scorching. Pour off *the pan juice, if necessary, until all are evenly browned. Now reduce* heat to 300°F. Baste with pan juice and bake a couple of hours.

From George Baxt

A less haphazard version of the recipe given on page 61.

VEAL MEAT AGAIN

2 lbs. veal, thinly sliced
2 medium onions, chopped fine
butter
2 lbs. very small potatoes
1 lb. button mushrooms
1 cup heavy cream (more if needed)
2 tbsp. vermouth (more if needed)
black pepper
paprika

Saute the onions in butter and add the veal, sauteeing two minutes on each side. Meanwhile boil the potatoes, add the mushrooms, and place all cooked ingredients, seasoned to taste with black pepper

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and paprika, in a Dutch oven. Stir in heavy cream and vermouth and let simmer in a 400°F. oven for half an hour. Serve with rice or kasha.

From Cindy Goldman

MYSTERY CUTLETS

2 potatoes, peeled
1 10-oz. package each chopped spinach, chopped broccoli, and cauliflower
½ large onion, peeled
1 egg
½ cup matzo meal
½ tsp. salt (or to taste)
⅛ tsp. pepper
vegetable oil for frying

Boil potatoes about 45 minutes, or until soft.

Cook spinach, broccoli, and cauliflower together according to package directions. Drain very well in colander.

Mash potatoes. Add cooked vegetables and mash together.

Grate onion into potato-vegetable mixture, then add remaining ingredients (except oil) and mix well.

Refrigerate at least ½ hour.

Form mixture into patties and fry in preheated vegetable oil until lightly browned on both sides. Remove to paper towels and pat off excess oil.

From Rhoda Koenig

"This is a dessert I like because it is a happy compromise between cheese and dessert."

½ cup ricotta
2 tsp. orange honey
¼ tsp. cinnamon
1 tbsp. Framboise

Mix the above, sprinkle with nutmeg, and serve with cantaloupe, apricots, or peaches.

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From John F. Suter

John Suter's wife Polly, whose recipe this really is, told him to tell us that it has been keeping their family in bad shape for over forty years.

BROWNIE PUDDING

1 cup flour
2 tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. salt
¾ cup sugar
2 tbsp. cocoa
½ cup milk
1 tsp. vanilla
2 tbsp. melted shortening
¾ cup nuts (walnuts, pecans, or other)
¾ cup brown sugar
¼ cup cocoa

Sift flour and add baking powder, salt, sugar, and 2 tbsp. cocoa. Add milk, vanilla, and shortening. Mix until smooth, then add nuts and pour into greased 8-inch-square cake pan. Mix the brown sugar and ¼ cup cocoa and sprinkle over the batter. Pour 1 ¾ cups hot water over the entire batter and bake at 350°F. for 40–45 minutes.

From Edward D. Hoch

BEN SNOW PUDDING

1 package orange-flavored gelatin
1½ cups hot water
½ cup sherry
2 egg whites

Dissolve gelatin in hot water. Chill until syrupy, then add sherry. Add egg whites, place in bowl of cracked ice, and beat until fluffy and thick. Turn into mold or molds and chill until firm. Unmold and serve with whipped cream or custard sauce.

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From Shaun Usher (a.k.a. Jeffry Scott)

"In Wales the tradition is to serve the Christmas pudding stone-cold—in slices, like cake."

CHRISTMAS PUD

¼ lb. white flour
½ tsp. mixed spices
¼ tsp. grated nutmeg
½ lb. fresh bread crumbs
10 oz. finely shredded suet or shortening
½ lb. soft brown sugar
¾ lb. seedless raisins
¾ lb. sultanas
2 oz. mixed chopped peel
2 oz. walnuts, finely chopped
peel of small orange, finely grated
4 large eggs, beaten
1 large carrot, freshly grated
½ wineglass brandy or dry sherry
½ tsp. almond extract
¼ pint milk

Sift flour, spices, and nutmeg into *big* bowl. Add bread crumbs, suet or shortening, sugar, raisins, sultanas, mixed peel, chopped nuts, and orange peel. Toss together thoroughly. Combine with eggs, grated carrot, brandy or sherry, almond extract, and milk, mixing well. (Note important P.S.) Leave overnight in cool place.

Divide batter between two buttered, 2-pint basins. Cover securely with foil, string around the top. Steam steadily for six hours (yes!), making sure you keep water topped up around the basins. Leave to cool for a quarter hour in the basins, then turn out and leave until stone-cold. Wrap in foil and store in cool, dry place (closet rather than fridge) until December 25. To serve, defoil puds, return to buttered basins, cover, and steam again for two hours. Turn them out on warmed dish and eat with custard, sweet sauce, brandy butter, or fresh cream. Our clan, resisting all save temptations, usually has combinations of at least three of these toppings.

P.S. In England, traditionally each member of the family gives the cake mixture a good stir (minimum one minute—we're talking serious, wooden-spoon rotation here) and gets to make a wish while so doing.

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From Shaun Usher (a.k.a. Jeffry Scott)

"To complement your Christmas pudding: brandy butter—a hard sauce, really. Served cold with your hot pud, a nice contrast of temperature and texture."

BRANDY BUTTER

¼ lb. lightly salted butter
¼ lb. *sifted* confectioner's sugar
¼ lb. granulated sugar
1 tbsp. milk
1 tbsp. brandy
2 oz. ground almonds
cinnamon

Beat butter until creamy. Gradually beat in the two sugars, alternating them with the milk and brandy as you go. When light and fluffy, add the ground almonds, mixing well. Put result in a pretty dish and sprinkle lightly with cinnamon. You can make it on Christmas Eve. It stores well in a cool place.

Serves six.

From Allen J. Hubin

ROLL KUCHEN (or ROLL COOKIES)

2 eggs
½ cup shortening, melted
½ cup milk
2 tsp. salt
2½ cups flour
fat for deep frying
strawberry jam (optional)

Beat the eggs and add the shortening, milk, salt, and flour. Knead lightly on a floured cloth or board. Roll the dough flat, cut relatively small shapes, and fry these a few at a time in deep fat until crisp and light. Drain on an absorbent surface. Eat particularly with strawberry jam. Likely to be habit-forming.

(2 more recipes on page 158!)

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a ***NEW*** **Uncle Abner story by**

JOHN F. SUTER

In introducing John F. Suter's previous story about Uncle Abner in the May issue ("The Marked Man"), I referred to its unique and appealing Jeffersonian tone and setting. But as Mr. Suter gently pointed out, the Abner stories are placed in the 1830s–1850s and Thomas Jefferson died in 1826. It is good to have my erroneous sense of history set straight, so to speak, for my own sake and yours.

That being said, I'm delighted to introduce you to this new Uncle Abner story, its tone and setting unique and appealing as ever . . .

A PLACE FOR GOLD

by JOHN F. SUTER

When I was fifteen, my Uncle Abner suffered a great wound in his right thigh.

It happened by accident, when my father was shifting hay in our hayloft. He put down the pitchfork, thinking he had done it in a safe manner, but he had misjudged. It slithered away, gathering speed on the slippery hay, plunging to the lower floor just as my uncle entered the barn. Three of the sharp tines buried themselves in the outer edge of his right leg.

Although Doctor Storm treated him successfully, Abner's leg still gave him great pain a week later, and he could not ride his horse. Complaint was not in his nature, but he never flinched from reality.

The day I drove him into town in the buggy, the reality was this: Abner could not endure standing long enough to harness a team. Even if my father or I did this for him, we did not know if he could

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stand the strain of driving. We did agree to accept his judgment that he could endure being a passenger if he could put a good pillow under his leg.

It was the day after Thanksgiving. My uncle had business with a grazier on the other side of town, but our arrival became delayed. As we drove through town, Sheriff Thaxton came out of Spring's Tavern as we passed. He held up a hand when he recognized us.

"Abner! I was going to send someone for Randolph, but you are a good substitute. Come in. I need your help."

My uncle tried to refuse, pleading his wound.

"I urge you to try," the sheriff said. "You can bring your pillow and sit. It's a good brain I need."

"Very well," Uncle Abner replied. "Perhaps it will turn my thoughts from my own problem." He became silent. I knew he was trying to avoid what came next. "I'll need help in getting down," he said grudgingly. "I must not let the bleeding start again."

Thaxton willingly sprang to his aid, and Abner slowly and painfully alighted. He hobbled carefully to the inn door while I tethered the horses.

Spring's Tavern was one of two in the county. Roy's, farther out from town, was frequented by drovers, traveling tinkers, and the more boisterous among us. Spring's owner had disposed of his earlier frame premises and erected a two-story brick building better suited to travelers wanting to break their journey. The tavern still drew customers, but Spring was becoming more important as an innkeeper.

I found Uncle Abner seated in the dining room with six others standing about. At his right hand was blocky Sheriff Thaxton, his hair spiky as ever.

"Tell me your problem," my uncle was saying as I came in.

Thaxton indicated a portly man standing by the fireplace across the room.

"Mr. Merrick says that a gold locket of his was stolen."

Merrick drew himself up, the light glinting on his spectacles. His fleshy jowls quivered. "The sheriff is correct, sir. It was taken from this very mantel, where I had laid it."

"Describe it to me," Abner said.

"It is round, the diameter about the length of the last joint of my little finger. As the sheriff said, it is gold, with a large garnet in the center of the face. It hangs on a gold chain."

"Is there any decoration?" my uncle asked.

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"None. And there is nothing inside. It belonged to my mother. I am taking it to my daughter-in-law in Marietta."

Uncle Abner shifted in his seat. He grimaced. "Why was it on the mantel? When did it disappear?"

Merrick dipped his head toward Spring's wife, one of the four persons standing near the kitchen door. "Last night I noticed that this woman wore a brooch set in garnets. This morning I brought the locket to breakfast, to show it to her. When she had looked at it, I foolishly laid it on the mantel. I forgot it when I went up for my bag. When I returned, it was gone."

I glanced at Mrs. Spring. She was a handsome woman in her mid-forties, with an abundance of chestnut hair confined in a large white cap. Her plain brown dress was well protected by a white apron. She doubled as hostess and cook. Her only ornaments were her wedding band and a gold brooch at her neck. The brooch was the size of a guinea's egg, a gold circle set with small garnets.

Her rosy skin became redder. "Sir, you must have carried it with you and put it into your bag without realizing it. We are not thieves here."

The sheriff rubbed his short, wiry black beard. "They have all been searched," he told Abner, "even Mrs. Spring. My wife helped, but she had to leave. Mr. Merrick turned out his things for us. If we had found the locket, there would be no need for this."

Uncle Abner pointed to the fireplace. "It might have fallen. Did you rake through the fire?"

"Yes. It was not there," Thaxton said. Then, before Abner could speak, he added, "It might have melted, but no metal showed."

Abner turned to the Springs and their two helpers. "Had each of them been in the room when the locket was here?"

"Not at one time," the sheriff said. He indicated the sallow, stringy owner. "Spring came in when his wife was viewing the thing." He pointed to a tall, broad-shouldered youth a few years older than I. "Slater came in to put that basket of apples in the corner. And Casto," he nodded toward a short, squarish towhead in his early twenties, "brought in a fresh supply of logs."

Abner did not take his eyes off the group. "Was anyone else here?"

"Nobody. The chambermaid has not come in yet."

My uncle tugged at the pillow under his leg. "There must be many places to hide such an object. Did anyone go upstairs?"

"They say not. I searched Mr. Merrick's room thoroughly. He

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might have taken it there without thinking. My wife has also searched the Springs' living quarters."

Uncle Abner dropped his gaze. I had learned that he often observed hands. He was doing it now.

I looked, too, in curiosity. Spring's right fingers were ink-stained, but his hands were otherwise clean. They had to be: he served food. His wife's hands had traces of flour. Slater's hands were stained and dirty. Casto's were also soiled, as though he had been taking out ashes.

My uncle looked up and studied each of the helpers in turn.

"Casto," he said, "you are James Casto's son, Harold, I believe."

"Yes, sir," Casto replied.

"Are you interested in any girls near here?"

"He sees Mary Phillips," I murmured in my uncle's ear.

Casto flushed. "As Martin says, Mary Phillips."

Uncle Abner turned to Slater. "And you, Slater?"

"No one in particular," Slater said, unbothered by the question. "I haven't made up my mind."

Abner gazed at him intently. "You don't sound as though you have lived here very long."

Slater was rather a good-looking fellow. He brushed back a lock of black hair and his face became expressionless. "I've been here three months. I'm from Connecticut, but I've known both New York and Philadelphia. Does that make me more of a suspect? Do you close ranks against outsiders?"

"No," said my uncle mildly. "You are a sojourner and are entitled to a sojourner's privileges—unless you forfeit them. You have not confessed to forfeiting them, or we would not be here."

"I have nothing to confess," Slater asserted.

Uncle Abner turned to the innkeeper. "Have you anything to tell me, Spring?"

The man's face was drawn. "What would this do to my business if this were true, Abner?"

"Roy has harbored a murderer and others of ill-repute. He survives."

Spring shook his head. "I care about my reputation."

Abner turned to me. "Martin, go into the kitchen and the pantry and take stock carefully in your mind. Come back and tell me what you see."

I did as I was told, taking about fifteen minutes. I had always

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enjoyed such places, which seem to harbor the very smell of life. I was reluctant to return.

When I did, my uncle accosted me at once. "Well, Martin?"

"There are many pots and pans and all sizes of knives, forks, and spoons—"

"Pass over those for now. Food and drink."

I summoned up what I had seen. "A barrel of flour, nearly gone."

Thaxton interrupted. "I put up my sleeves and went through that. There was nothing but flour."

"A small pail of butter. A jar of salt. A crock of sugar. Several hams in the pantry."

"Any geese or other fowl?" my uncle asked.

"None."

"We served the last goose to Mr. Merrick," Mrs. Spring said.

"Very well," Abner said. "The inside of a bird is a good place to hide small things."

I continued: "There were several kegs of liquors."

"It would have taken too much time and commotion to hide anything there," Abner remarked.

"A basket of apples. A basket of walnuts, some with hulls and some without. A big jar of dried corn."

"I suppose that more perishable things are outside, protected," Abner mused. "Have you investigated the things Martin mentioned, Thaxton?"

"Only the flour. There has been no time—"

Abner pointed to the basket of apples in the corner. "Or that basket?"

"We turned that out with no success."

Uncle Abner sat for a moment, thinking. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a coin. My eyes widened. It was a golden double eagle.

He handed it to the sheriff. "Give it to Merrick," he said. "Let them pass it around until it comes back to me."

Merrick took the coin with some surprise. He only glanced at it, then took it over to Casto.

Casto's blue eyes grew round. He turned the coin over and over. Almost as though it were fragile, he handed it to Slater.

The tall Yankee looked at Abner with a half smile. "Are you sure you'll get it back?" he said. His eyes softened when he looked at the coin. He flipped it twice, then gave a faint sigh and handed it to Mrs. Spring.

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The innkeeper's wife laughed lightly. "More gold than I'll ever hope to see," she said, turning it over in her palm before giving it to her husband.

"Perhaps not," Spring said. "They all look good in the cash drawer." He looked at it ruefully and returned it to Abner.

"Did that tell you where my locket is?" demanded Merrick.

"No," my uncle answered, "but I learned from it."

He turned to Thaxton. "Now take the five of them out back and see that they all wash their hands."

A murmur went up at this, but no protests. As they all filed out, Uncle Abner beckoned me to him.

"Did you see any empty baskets, Martin?"

"I saw one in the pantry."

"I think that will do. Bring it here."

I hurried to do as he asked. I brought it into the dining room just as the Springs returned. The others followed soon after.

When everyone was in the room, Abner gestured to the sheriff. "Thaxton, bring those apples from over there and transfer them to this basket."

"I have already searched there," the sheriff protested.

"Someone might have counted on that," Abner replied. "A good hiding place is one searched thoroughly earlier."

Mollified, Thaxton did as Uncle Abner had requested. The search yielded nothing.

"Now," my uncle said, "let us see the contents of the other basket of apples from the kitchen."

The sheriff brought them in and changed them, a few at a time, into the just-emptied basket. Again nothing was evident.

I suspected that Thaxton would have wanted to call off the search, but he did not dare to suggest it. He had asked a wounded man for help, and he was bound by that unstated pact.

"Let us try the walnuts next," Abner said.

When the nuts were brought in, my uncle let the sheriff move them from one basket to the other. This, too, yielded nothing.

Then Uncle Abner changed what was being done.

"Martin," he said, "take the nuts and put them back into the first basket. Put the hulled ones in first."

"But," I began, "the sheriff—"

"Yes, I know," he said. "Your hands. The stain will wear off."

I did as he asked. The hulled nuts, in their black shells, were of little bother to me.

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"Now," Uncle Abner directed, "take those still in the hulls and put them in one at a time. Look at each one carefully and feel the hull for cuts."

I thought I understood his meaning, and excitement began to build in me. I picked them up, still in their brownish-green jackets, and began to put them into the basket, oblivious of the juice that rubbed off on my hands. Four unblemished except for natural bruises —nine—twelve. The number left was four, and nothing had appeared.

The fourteenth nut was the one. There was a tiny, hairline mark all the way around the hull, lengthwise. I pried at it with my fingers but could not make it come apart.

Thaxton reached for it. "I'll step on it," he said.

"No!" Abner exclaimed. "Think what you might do."

Spring went to the kitchen and brought me a small knife. I took it and put the edge to the crack. Slowly and grudgingly, it came apart. Something stringy bridged the widening gap.

"It was sealed with flour," Uncle Abner said. "That would make sure it held together."

When the hull had opened into two sections, something gleamed inside. I handed the hull to the sheriff.

Thaxton reached into the cavity and hooked a finger through something. He drew it out carefully. A gold chain unwound. At the end of it was a round gold locket. In the center of the face was a red stone. A garnet.

"That's it!" exclaimed Merrick. He held out a fleshy hand.

"Thank heaven that's over," Spring exclaimed.

"Part of it is finished," Abner said. "Do you want Thaxton to stop at this point?"

"Why, no—" Spring hesitated.

"If it is not finished, the good name of several of you will always be stained," my uncle went on.

"Then go ahead," Spring said. "Can you end it?"

"I believe I can," Abner said.

"Let us think," he began. "I passed around a gold coin. The reactions to it varied. To one—perhaps two—of you five, it was another coin. One person had never seen one. He almost feared a gold object. Another saw in it something not easily attained. But one of you treated it with easiness and acquisitiveness, both written plain on his face. This one wanted gold. The vine from the root of evil was there to see. The love of it."

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Uncle Abner scanned five faces. "Who stole the locket?"

"Merrick? It was possible. He might have been thinking to extort money from you, Spring, if the thing could not be found.

"You, Spring? Or your wife? Would you steal to sell it? Who in this county would buy? Only a few of our people could pay, and those who could would not. Your wife could not wear it, because it would be recognized. She clearly likes to wear her treasures, even in the kitchen.

"Casto? Perhaps you are so besotted by a girl that you would steal a trinket for her. But she would ask where you got it, and the story would soon emerge.

"This leaves Slater—our sojourner."

The tall man crossed his arms and sneered. "Put it on an outsider, yes."

"I make no excuses," Abner said, his voice beginning to rumble. "I only seek truth, and it is because you are an outsider that it *is* truth. You admit that you have lived in many places. Places where you could learn to sell stolen things. You planned to leave here with at least one thing that you could sell in some larger place, a city."

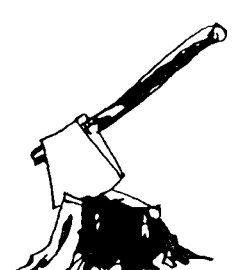
"I'll not be made a scapegoat," Slater told him. "I demand fairness. There is no way to connect me with this."

"Just as Job said there is a place for gold, so has the Lord given a sign that points to you," my uncle thundered. "Look at your hands! See the stain the walnut hulls have left! A stain that does not wash off!"

"I was hulling the other nuts. It came from them. Prove otherwise!"

"The only thief was someone here," Uncle Abner said, barely letting his wound keep him in his chair.

"Everyone here has washed. And the only one whose hands have walnut stains is you!"



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a *NEW* short story by

DONALD OLSON

But how could Mr. Kleck expect Louisa to sell a house where murder and suicide were committed when no one else had been able to, Hazel asked.

"Just between you and me," Louisa said, "I don't think he does expect me to. I think he plans to use it as an excuse to fire me. But I've made up my mind. I'm going to sell that place if I have to pull every trick in the book . . ."

A VERY SPECIAL HOUSE

by DONALD OLSON

"If I hear that beastly phrase once more," Louisa Tippett declared hotly on the phone to her friend Hazel, "I'll throw a shoe at whoever says it. Or whispers it. They always *whisper* it, although they've all guessed by now I'm a trifle deaf in one ear. Poor Louisa! It's infuriating. I will not be patronized by those *kids!*"

Hazel, who had known Louisa since they'd worked together in the box factory when they were girls, ventured a sympathetic rebuke. "Throw something else, dear. You know what shoes cost nowadays. But honestly—and don't go aiming a shoe at *me*—I really mean this, Louisa, I think you're being much too sensitive. I'm sure they don't mean to be unkind."

"I'm sure they don't. But when I overhear it I could just *bawl*. Like this morning, for instance. We're all coming out of Mr. Kleck's office after he'd saddled me with the Jermyn house and I hear Brenda whisper to that smarty-pants Tom, 'Poor Louisa, stuck with that white elephant.' And Tom says, 'You know why, don't you? Because she pulled a blooper on the Bradmoor sale.' Which, incidentally, I

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didn't! It's not my fault they changed their minds and decided on a condo!"

Hazel clucked her tongue and uttered consoling noises. "Pay them no mind, Louisa. Why, all of us at the Widows Club think it's absolutely marvelous how you studied for your real-estate-broker's license and passed the exam. A woman your age! How many of us would have the spunk?"

"Well, it takes more than spunk to *sell* real estate, I've found that out. And I know, too, that Morris Kleck would never have agreed to take me on if his father hadn't gone to bat for me. But no use kidding myself. I can tell from certain little remarks he's been making that he'll let me go if I don't start pulling my weight. I strongly suspect the Jermyn place is to be Tippett's Last Stand."

"Poor—oops, sorry. But how can he expect you to sell a house where murder and suicide were committed when no one else has been able to?"

"Just between you and me, Hazel, I don't think he does expect me to. I think he plans to use it as an excuse to fire me. But I've made up my mind. I'm going to sell that place if I have to pull every trick in the book. I really mean that."

That there were a great many tricks in the book Louisa had quickly learned from her colleagues at the agency, and many of those tricks would have troubled her conscience to practice, no matter how fervently she wished to make the grade—to prove to herself and everyone else that she needn't settle for a Social Security pittance which was never elastic enough to cover those contingencies not even the most stringent budgeting could anticipate. She herself hadn't worked after marrying Bert, whose wages had produced the one dubious advantage of keeping them in the lowest tax brackets. Their children, Meg and Peter, both now lived at what might as well be the ends of the earth, and upon Bert's death ten years ago Louisa had barely managed to hold onto their comfortable flat—until, at sixty-five, she had qualified for one of those dinky, cheerless apartments in a downtown hotel converted to housing for the elderly.

Elderly! Louisa found the word as offensive as that other epithet. She was a comely, grey-haired, bright-eyed little woman with more get-up-and-go, she could honestly boast, than most of her friends. She felt as sound of mind and strong of body as she had twenty years ago. Though proud of what she had accomplished, she was disheartened to discover that when it came to being a salesperson in real estate, the proof, as she had told Hazel, was not so much in the

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pudding as in the crust—"if puddings ever have crust." It took a lot of crust to practice those subtle evasions often essential when stressing only the good points of a piece of property.

For weeks thereafter, Louisa put all her heart into her efforts to sell the Jermyn place. From local buyers she hadn't even a nibble of interest. They all knew the gruesome details of Henry Jermyn's ax-slaying of his unfaithful young wife and his own subsequent suicide by hanging. Even on the sunniest day, when the gabled white house on the corner of Hunt Road and Shadyside appeared to best advantage, the memory of those bloody incidents seemed to cast a cloud over it. While a reputation for its being haunted might have been considered an asset, the double tragedy was too grisly, too chilling, and too recent to imbue the property with any such appeal.

If she were to sell the place, Louisa knew it would have to be to one of those professional people frequently transferred to the city from other branches of their firms. She did show the house to several such prospects, to no avail. There were either too many bedrooms or too few. The box stairs were too steep and unattractive. There was too much lawn or not enough. There might be drainage problems. Each time a sale appeared imminent and then fell through, Louisa detected a growing air of dissatisfaction behind Morris Kleck's bland words of encouragement. "There's a buyer somewhere, Louisa, for every house. You've made no mention, I'm sure, of—well, you know what—to any of your prospects?"

"No, Mr. Kleck, I've kept my mouth shut about that." She couldn't suppress a faint note of disapproval. It worried her to think that whoever should buy the place might hold it against her when they found out about the Jermyn affair, as they surely would. Louisa found even the mildest sins of omission reprehensible.

Meanwhile, her own attitude toward the Jermyn house had taken a curious and unexpected turn. At first she had admitted to a morbid sense of horror whenever she parked her small battered station wagon in the circular drive rising from the road to the barn and garage. With a feeling of tremulous unease, she would unlock the door and step from the broad veranda into the hall between the kitchen and dining room. One could imagine in that funereal silence the invisible, lingering presence of something evil, a subtle emanation of unwholesome passions. One almost expected to see bloodstains on the walls, even though the murder had been committed

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in the barn and Jermyn had hanged himself in one of the upstairs bedrooms. A room Louisa was always reluctant to enter.

Owing perhaps to her firm belief in the textbook maxim that before one can sell anything one must first sell oneself, Louisa found herself with each visit becoming less aware of these disturbing elements and more impressed with the house itself. The pervasive atmosphere of horror was gradually dispelled as her mind responded to the more captivating spell of those big sunny rooms looking out upon an undeniably charming landscape of sloping green lawns and distant wooded hills. She decided it was quite the most enchanting house she had ever known. She fell in love with it. She found herself arriving earlier than necessary for appointments to show it and lingering long after the prospective buyer's departure, as if reluctant to lose that warmly proprietary feeling evoked in her by the set of keys temporarily investing her with an agreeable sense of ownership.

She wasn't consciously aware of how deeply she had become attached to the house until one afternoon when she kept an appointment to show it to a young man named Burke Wesley, recently transferred to the local branch of a large industrial firm. So eloquently did she describe the many charms of the property, so lovingly did she dwell on the splendor of the sunsets to be enjoyed from the veranda, so glowingly did she point out the coziness of winter evenings in front of that big stone fireplace, so rapturously did she extol the hominess of that spacious country kitchen that she found herself breathless with enthusiasm—and suddenly aware of the oddly amused look on the young man's face.

"Sorry," she murmured, feeling rather foolish. "I'm afraid I got carried away."

"Mrs. Tippett," he said, "you've lived in this house yourself, haven't you?"

A blush colored her cheeks. "Me? No! Whatever gave you that idea?"

"Well, it's hard to imagine anyone describing it so passionately unless there were some personal attachment."

She laughed uneasily. "I do admire it very much. But you're wrong—I never stepped foot on the property until we put our sign on it. Obviously you don't share my enthusiasm." For Wesley, a soft-spoken, dreamy-eyed advertising manager, had trailed Louisa

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around the property without venturing to ask more than an occasional question.

Now he grinned broadly. "Now *you're* wrong. I couldn't agree more with all you've said. In fact, you don't have to say a word. It's perfect. Just what I've always wanted. I never dreamed I'd find a place like this, almost a farm and yet so close to the city. As for my boys, they'll be crazy about it."

Louisa was stunned. "Are you saying—?"

"I'm saying I'd like Marcia to see it as soon as she gets here on Friday. If she likes it half as much as I do, consider it sold."

Later, on the phone to Hazel, Louisa said: "And that's not all. He said he hoped my boss realized what a supersaleswoman he has on his staff. I felt like asking him to put that in writing and sign it."

"Congratulations, dear. But take my advice. Don't start spending your commission quite yet. Remember, his wife hasn't seen it."

Morris Kleck voiced a similarly cautious optimism. "That's fine, Louisa, but I've heard you say the same things before. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I think it might be wise to let Tom take over from this point. We wouldn't want to let this sale slip through our fingers at such a delicate stage. With Tom's experience—"

"But that's not fair, Mr. Kleck! It's *my* sale! I've worked hard to move that piece of property—it's my house, not Tom's!"

Something in the fiery vigor of her retort brought a nervous smile to Kleck's face. "Yes, well—all right, Louisa. But it's only fair to warn you, I'll be *most* disappointed if you fail to get Wesley's name on a contract."

Louisa knew what that meant.

Louisa's emotions betrayed a singular mixture of anticipation and regret as she arrived at the Jermyn place a good hour before the Wesleys were due to meet her. She parked in the driveway and before going inside wandered about the grounds, finally seating herself on a rustic bench under the catalpa tree. Her gaze drifted over the gently rolling hills beyond the long row of privets bordering the property to a field of mustard and goldenrod shimmering indistinctly under the soft blaze of an autumn sky and then returned to the barn, the apple trees, and the little shed once used as a chicken coop.

How Bert would have loved this place, she mused. Wasn't it the very model of that dream house he had talked about almost until the day he died? Could that, she wondered, be the secret of its en-

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chantment for her? She could hear him now: "Lou, honey, we're going to have another house of our own someday, I promise you. Not too far out—but private, you know, with enough land for a garden and fruit trees and where I can raise a few chickens. Remember? The way I did when we had our own place."

But it was never to be. The dream had died with him, and as she turned her eyes back to the house and gazed up at the pretty little dormer windows an acute sense of the brutal unfairness of life overwhelmed her. Again she savored the bittersweet memory of the one house she and Bert had owned, a modest bungalow Bert, a carpenter by trade, had built with his own hands. How they had loved that little house, vowing to live in it forever. As they might well have had things turned out differently—if hard times had not arrived, obliging them to leave Limestone and move to the city, where Bert had been forced to take an unskilled factory job. If he hadn't been injured on that dreadful milling machine—

She would never be able to erase the memory of that one last futile visit they had made to the mortgage-and-loan department of the Limestone Bank and Trust, how Bert's desperate, abject pleas for one more extension had brought a painful lump to her throat. He would rather have cut off a leg and an arm than lose that bungalow. And she recalled with sharp bitterness the bank officer's mealy-mouthed indifference as he had drummed his pencil on the documents before him and said, "We have obligations to our shareholders, Mr. Tippett. It's purely a matter of sound business practice."

And she remembered how she had sprung from her chair and cried out at the dapper, immovable bank officer. "It's not fair! We put all our savings into that house! Bert drove every nail with his own hands! It's just not *fair!*"

Bert was never really the same after that. Something essential to his very manliness had been lost forever. From that very day, Louisa could never pass a bank without feeling a surge of angry resentment toward them all.

Immersed in revery, she had sat for some time looking at the back of the house without seeing what presently impinged upon her consciousness. Then she leaned forward, narrowing her eyes. Perhaps it was only a trick of the light. She rose and walked slowly toward the screen door, where she suddenly stopped short. Behind the screen, she discovered a triangular section of glass broken out of the inside door. She felt certain the glass had been intact the day before.

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The door itself was still locked, however. With quickening heartbeat, she hurried around to unlock the front door and investigate.

The house was silent. She didn't feel afraid, only angry and resentful of whoever might have broken that pane of glass. There was nothing to steal inside the house, yet she glanced quickly around, fearful of discovering obscenities smeared on the walls or a litter of liquor bottles shattered on the hardwood floors. She glanced at her watch. The Wesleys should be arriving in less than half an hour.

She breathed more easily as each room revealed no signs of violation. The door to the box staircase—had she left it open like that? She couldn't remember, she might have. Without trying to be quiet, she climbed the steps and explored the passageway, the bathroom, the first three bedrooms. There were no signs of desecration.

Then she opened the last door, the door to the room in which Henry Jermyn had hanged himself.

A man lay on the bare floor, his shoulders propped against the far wall, the small of his back cushioned by what appeared to be a rolled-up olive-drab army jacket. His head lolled to one side and at first glance she thought he was merely asleep—a vagrant looking for shelter. A youngish man, well built, with a lean sallow face, wide lips, a stub of a nose, fair hair damply plastered to his skull. A moist flush of color disguised the pallor of his skin. Only when her eyes slid down from his face to the denim shirt and jeans did she notice the dark stain on his chest.

With a shudder, she took an involuntary step backward—and at that instant the man's eyes opened, not widely but rather as if sleepily awakened from a natural slumber. With a slight, animallike jerk of sudden awareness, he discovered her standing there, his arresting blue eyes registering the sight with only a dull flicker of alertness.

Louisa felt nothing quite so alarming as fright. Her most immediate concern was to get the man out of there before the Wesleys arrived—but then his obvious helplessness stirred an altogether different emotion. Something in his unshaven face, his expression of weakness, pain, and frustration pricked a distant memory: Bert gazing up at her from that hospital bed in Limestone after the accident.

Cautiously, she advanced into the room.

She was about to speak when his lips moved and the word he uttered nearly destroyed her fragile grip on her composure.

"Ma?"

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She took a quick breath and moved closer. "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

His hand moved slightly, his eyes remaining fixed on hers with a gradual lightening of that first cautious uncertainty and confusion. Louisa knelt beside him, her eyes on the sodden shirt. "You're hurt," she murmured.

"I knew I'd make it, Ma. Nowhere else to go. Don't worry, I'm okay now." Again the hand sketched a vague imploring gesture. "Water—"

Louisa shook her head. "The water's turned off—" Then she remembered the plastic jug in the car she'd carried since an incident with a broken radiator hose had left her stranded. Hardly questioning her own action, she hurried down the stairs and a moment later was back beside him, tipping the jug to his lips.

Some of the water dripped down his stubbly chin. He was younger than she'd thought, not much more than a boy. As she lowered the jug and gingerly lifted the edge of his shirt away from his chest, she felt momentarily sick. The blood had congealed around a handkerchief pressed to the wound. "Don't move," she whispered. "Lie back. I'll get help."

As if the water might have revived him somewhat, his eyes betrayed a sudden sharp anxiety and his hand closed weakly around Louisa's wrist. "No! Don't let 'em find me. Please, Ma, don't tell 'em I'm here."

As she tried to withdraw her hand from his grasp, she felt a convulsive tremor pass through his body. "It's all right," she said. "I won't tell anyone. But I must get you a blanket. You can't lie here like this."

He released her and she retreated, keeping her eyes on his.

As she returned to the car, her thoughts were in a tumult. Should she drive to the nearest neighbor, call the police? Wait for the Wesleys to arrive? But first she must cover him—she couldn't leave him shivering and delirious on the bare floor. As she started around to the trunk of her car, she noticed that the garage door hung slightly ajar. Peering through the small windows, she saw another car inside. So that was how he had got here.

Back in the room again, she saw with relief that he had dropped off again, his head drooping forward, shoulders slack against the wall. She stole to his side and began unfolding the blanket. Then

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she paused, holding her breath, and the blanket slipped from her suddenly useless fingers.

"Oh, Lord. Oh, dear Lord—" She forced herself to kneel and touch his face with trembling fingers. Then she reached for his wrist and felt for a pulse, even though she knew instinctively that he was dead.

Had she ever imagined, while peacefully going about her daily business, that she would ever find herself faced with such an alarming and extraordinary situation, she would surely have pictured herself thrown into blind panic—screaming perhaps and rushing madly out of the house. But this was real, this was happening, and Louisa Tippett found herself responding in a manner she would later regard as inconceivable as the incident itself. It's more than likely she might indeed have reacted quite differently had she been given time to ponder her course of action. In that moment of indecision, however, the sound of an approaching car distracted her thoughts and produced a feeling of panic far more acute than would ordinarily have been expected to attack her by what had happened in this room.

The Wesleys! Her first impulse—to rush down to them and blurt out the truth—gave way to another which could only be explained by some instinctive acceleration of the thought processes, revealing, as in the swift passage of a dream, the inevitable consequences of this horrendous calamity. There would be police and sensational publicity. The mysterious death of a stranger in the old Jermyn place. The murder and suicide would again be front-page news. If the house was jinxed before, this would render it even more gruesomely an object of local horror. Perhaps it would *never* be sold.

And it was her last chance, she knew that. Morris Kleck had made that unmistakably clear.

For the first time, Louisa noticed the bloodstains on the floor where the body lay. They seemed to crystalize her decision. She fumbled with her ring of keys and found one that would lock the bedroom door.

Her later recollection of the following half hour remained a jumble of muddled impressions. She could scarcely have given a clear description of Marcia Wesley's appearance, except that she was by no means the timid, amenable young wife Louisa had anticipated. She did remember her mounting disapproval of the woman, however—not because Marcia Wesley didn't like the house but because the picture

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she painted in her smugly overbearing voice of what she would do to it filled Louisa with shocked dismay. Why, she would destroy the very essence of its homely charm! A swimming pool, a palisade fence, a gift shop in the barn, a wrought-iron staircase! A modern kitchen and a game room with a pool table! She would rip out this and change that. It would be criminal.

There remained as well a hazy recollection of explaining the car in the garage as having been parked there by a neighbor. And, oh dear, what could have happened to the key to that bedroom door? And the way the impeccably cool and mannered Marcia Wesley had looked at her with that condescending smile and said icily: "Mrs. Tippett, why do I get the idea you're trying to hide something from us? Is something wrong? You appear a bit flustered."

And, horror of horrors, what could have possessed her, she later wondered, to blurt out those forbidden words? She knew only that something had come over her, something she was powerless to suppress, when Marcia Wesley, chattering in the barn about the "delicious little shop" she would create there, had noticed Louisa's growing agitation and said again: "I do wish you'd be perfectly candid, Mrs. Tippett. If you're concealing something we ought to know about—"

Whereupon Louisa had said rudely: "It happened right there on the spot where you're standing. That's where he struck her with the ax. Look real close and you might see the bloodstains under the straw. And that bedroom that's locked—that's where old man Jermyn strung himself up."

Perhaps fearful that her composure might break at any moment, Louisa had merely wanted to hasten their departure. Only after they had left had she recognized the folly of her outburst. Not that it would make any difference. Marcia Wesley had merely raised her eyebrows and said, "How divine! Burke, you didn't tell me about that. How excitingly *grand guignol!* What a tale to tell over cocktails on the patio we'll build."

Once they had driven away, Louisa felt drained of her last ounce of energy. Her mind had gone numb. She turned from waving them goodbye to look up at that bedroom window and knew she could never find the will power to go back into the house. Not yet. Not until she had taken time to clear her mind and consider rationally what she must do. She climbed into her car and drove away. The house was locked. No one could get in.

She took a couple of aspirins as soon as she got home, kicked off

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her shoes, and lay down on the bed. It all seemed unreal, here in the familiar presence of her own possessions. Oh, Bert, she cried silently to his photograph, what am I to do? What am I to tell them?

Her rest was interrupted by a phone call from Morris Kleck.

"Louisa, if you're not too busy would you mind coming over to the office? I want to talk to you. And bring the keys to the Jermyn place." Her delay in replying provoked a note of mild irritation. "Louisa? Are you there?"

"Yes. Yes, I'm here, Mr. Kleck. The keys to the Jermyn place? I don't understand. I—"

"Just bring them, Louisa. I'll explain when you get here."

"Yes, all right. I won't be long. But I've a few errands to run before I get there." Somehow she knew she must find the strength to do what had to be done. She had come this far to prevent anything from robbing her of that sale—she dared not falter now no matter how dreadful a task lay ahead. Tricks of the trade, she thought grimly. If there's a dead body lying around, don't, for goodness sake, let the buyer see it.

Before entering the house, she checked the car in the garage and discovered to her dismay that the keys were not in the ignition. With growing consternation, she returned to the room upstairs. Only when she shifted the body did she discover the keys in the left-hand pocket of the man's jeans.

As the body sagged away from her, she saw that it had rested not against an army jacket as she had supposed but against a green-canvas bag. With a pang of remembered bitterness, she read the words stenciled on the bag: LIMESTONE BANK AND TRUST COMPANY. Unbidden, there flashed across her mind the image of that bank officer's face as he refused Bert's desperate plea. "I'm sorry. It's a matter of sound business practice, Mr. Tippett."

With a sudden unreasoning decisiveness, Louisa pulled the bag clear and opened it. She uttered a sharp gasp of astonishment, paused only an instant, and then with trembling fingers began counting the money. Never thereafter would Louisa be able to explain to herself from what source sprang the physical strength and determination of will to do what she did. In days to come her actions would acquire in her mind a quality of nightmarish unreality: returning to the man's car and backing it from the garage, dragging the dead weight of his body down the stairs and out to it, driving two miles down Shadyside Road and abandoning them at a secluded

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turnoff. Later, she would refuse to believe she could have done it all by herself—it was as if Bert were beside her, whispering approval and encouragement as he shared the ordeal.

"I can overlook everything else, Louisa," intoned Morris Kleck, drumming a pencil on his desk. "But that you should willfully tell the Wesleys about the Jermyn business! I don't care what they told you, the story I got from Wesley on the phone was quite different. They talked it over and decided, all things considered, that they didn't think such a house would provide a salutary atmosphere for their children. I'm sorry, I truly am, but you can't say I didn't give you every chance. It's simply a matter of good business, Louisa."

Strangely enough, it didn't matter to her in the slightest. She listened meekly, then smiled her sweetest smile. "I'm sorry, too, Mr. Kleck. I should have kept quiet, but you know how it is with us old folks. We're so frightfully absent-minded."

Not even the "Poor Louisa" whispered behind her back as she cleared out her desk could arouse the faintest flush of annoyance.

Hazel's sympathetic response to the news of her friend's dismissal brought only a philosophical sigh from Louisa. "It's probably all for the best, Hazel. I suppose I simply had too many old-fashioned scruples to make a good salesperson. But now I've got some pleasanter news for you. What would you say if I told you I'm thinking of *buying* a house instead of selling one?"

Hazel snorted. "I'd say you were off your rocker, dear."

"Maybe I am. I guess that would explain a lot of things I've been doing lately. I'm serious, though, really I am. Keep it under your hat, but I'm coming into a little money. Quite out of the blue. I never told you about Bert's old aunt in Limestone—"

Not until Louisa had done her best to dampen Hazel's curiosity did her friend say, "You're sure a lucky one, Louisa. The only way I could ever buy a house would be to rob a bank. Like that fellow they found shot to death in a stolen car out on Shadyside Road. They found the body, that is, but not the money he stole. All small bills, apparently—untraceable. Now listen, Louisa, don't be so mysterious. The way you talk you must have a special house in mind to buy."

Louisa glanced across at Bert's photograph. "You're right, Hazel, I have. A very special house."

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a *NEW* Jeffery Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"Your cooperation is necessary to get this particular library open again," Rand's father told the librarian in the community library near Dusseldorf. It was late August 1945, shortly after Japan's surrender to the Allies.

"We have already removed all volumes of Nazi literature," she told him. "They are stored in the basement."

"Very good. My son Jeff and I will inspect them, as well as the remaining books on your shelves."

One appeal series stories have is the constant revelation of new information about the major characters, as they grow—or, as with this new Rand story, as recollected in flashback . . .

THE SPY'S STORY

by EDWARD D. HOCH

It was a stormy night in January and Rand was seated by the fire with Leila, talking about the days before they were married. "How did you get started in Concealed Communications?" Leila asked suddenly. "I know about the Calendar Network in 1949, but what made you go into espionage work in the first place?"

Rand leaned back and closed his eyes, thinking about it. "I was at medical school briefly between King's School and Oxford, and that kept me out of the Army until the war ended. I suppose I felt a bit guilty about it and decided to enter government service." He paused. "No, that's not completely true. Something happened in the late summer of forty-five, just after the war, that decided me."

"What was it?"

"I saw my father kissing a librarian."

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Leila sat up on the sofa. "Now, you've really got to tell me about that!"

I suppose (Rand began) that not too many people today are aware of the denazification program conducted after Germany's surrender in nineteen forty-five. My father, who'd been with the British embassy in Paris before the war, had joined the so-called Civilian Military Forces of the Control Commission, which was overseeing the Allied occupation of Germany. It was late August, shortly after Japan's surrender, and I'd just turned nineteen. I'd already decided a doctor's life wasn't for me and had arranged a transfer from St. Thomas Medical School in Lambeth to St. John's at Oxford. I had a few weeks of freedom in the meantime and decided to accompany my father to Germany as his unpaid clerical assistant.

He was one of a number of scholars, writers, and public servants chosen to inspect German libraries in the British zone of occupation. His job was to study the political background of the librarians, as well as the content of the books on their shelves. Once he ruled that a particular library had been denazified, it was allowed to reopen to the German public. My knowledge of German was limited but I knew enough to help weed out the sort of books we wanted to remove.

It was at a small community library just outside Dusseldorf that my father first made the acquaintance of Hannah Peters and Dr. Fredericks. They'd been the librarians there when the war came to its end. The library itself was quite nice, located in a former church building with a spire that could be seen for miles across the countryside. Inside, there was a little balcony at one end of the building that I suppose had once accommodated a choir and organ. It had been made into a small office and workroom for the librarians, and it was here that my father spoke with Hannah Peters.

She was a pale brown-haired young woman who still seemed stunned by the aftermath of a war her country had lost. She avoided my father's eyes and kept her own on the faded carpet, answering his questions with the briefest of German syllables. After several routine questions my father asked her, "In your opinion, is your coworker Dr. Fredericks a Nazi?"

Her eyes came up for just an instant. "No."

My father sighed and rested his hands on the desk between them. His neatly trimmed moustache gave him the appearance of a handsome upper-class English gentleman, but I suppose to the frightened young woman he appeared only as the enemy. "Look here, Miss

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Peters," he said, "it's my job to ask these questions. We'd like to get you back in business as quickly as possible, but you must cooperate. There's a file in Dusseldorf which lists Dr. Fredericks as a member of the Nazi Party."

For the first time, she was moved to speak at length. "A great many people were members of the party for one reason or another," she said. "That does not mean they were Nazis. The war took a terrible toll on the German people, on every aspect of our lives. Libraries did not escape merely because they held books rather than bombs. You see our building, luckily untouched by war, but in the city of Dusseldorf many libraries were hit. More than sixty thousand books were destroyed."

"I'm sorry about that, of course. But your cooperation is necessary to get this particular library open again."

"We have already removed all volumes of Nazi literature. They are stored in the basement."

"Very good. My son Jeff and I will inspect them, as well as the remaining books on your shelves."

She directed her gaze at me for the first time. My father was the only one who ever called me Jeff, and I never liked it. My mother didn't like it, either, and she often reprimanded him for it. But Mother was back in London.

Hannah Peters led us to the basement and showed us several cartons of books. Some were laudatory biographies of Hitler and the important Nazi generals. Others were anti-Jewish diatribes. I began to realize how necessary it would be to check the remaining books on the shelves. Almost anything might have slipped through.

We heard the upstairs door open and Hannah said, "That will be Dr. Fredericks now. You'll want to talk with him, to ask him if I am a Nazi." She turned and went up the steps.

Dr. Walter Fredericks was a little man with a frightened, rabbitlike expression. No doubt word of our mission had preceded us and he viewed my father as a threat to his freedom and his future. "You are Charles Rand?" he asked, squinting behind thick steel-rimmed eyeglasses.

"That's correct—and this is my son Jeff, who's assisting me. I believe you know the reason for our visit."

"The books have already been separated."

"We know. Miss Peters was just showing them to us in the basement."

"We have thrown out everything by Goebbels."

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"That's a good start," my father assured him.

"And *Mein Kampf,* of course. Hannah and I know what you want removed. The offending books will be locked away, just as the books by Jews were locked away under the former government."

I didn't like the comparison he was drawing, but my father raised no objection. He allowed Fredericks to take us on a tour of the bookshelves, showing us a large collection of German textbooks and popular fiction dating from the pre-Nazi era. I saw Vicki Baum's *Menschen Im Hotel,* which I had read in English and seen as an American film. And *Im Westen Nichts Neues*—Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front.*

"We've been in limbo since the war ended," Fredericks explained. "I hope we can resume ordering books soon and get in some newer titles."

"Once you're open again, things will be back to normal," my father assured him.

We left the library, promising to return the following day for a more thorough inspection of the books and records. As we drove back toward Dusseldorf, past the steel mills where production was slowly being channeled to peacetime needs, I said, "That shouldn't take us long tomorrow. It looks fairly routine. Where do we go next?"

"Cologne." An Army staff car had been provided for our transportation and my father drove it well, avoiding occasional craters that served as reminders of the wartime bombing.

We were billeted with the British occupation forces in an area near the Rhine River, and we ate dinner that evening at their mess hall. Strict regulations against fraternization with Germans were still in effect then, so none of the troops went into the city in the evenings unless on patrol. My father ate heartily but talked little during the meal. His mind seemed to be elsewhere, as if planning our future schedule.

After dinner they were showing a recent British film, *The Way to the Stars.* I stayed to watch it but my father excused himself, saying he wanted to catch up on his paperwork. The film was sort of a war story as seen from the home front, about the guests of a small hotel near an airfield, with John Mills and Michael Redgrave in the principal roles. In the opening sequence, the camera prowled through the abandoned air base, picking out details and objects that would become important when the film flashed back to tell its story.

But I was uneasy, and after several minutes I left the hall to join my father. The staff car outside our quarters was missing, but for

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some reason it didn't surprise me that he'd gone somewhere, maybe into the city. I had a driver's license and my ID card as a member of the Civilian Military Forces, so I was able to borrow a jeep from the motor pool. I wasn't really looking for him, but I figured if he could go out on the prowl so could I.

There were a good many ruined buildings in the city, and as I drove down Volkinger Strasse I began to realize for the first time what those people must have lived through. Of course, we had lived through it in London, too, but we were the victors. It made a difference.

I was stopped once by a military-police vehicle and warned against fraternization. When they asked what I was doing driving around alone, I told them I was on my way to pick up my father after a meeting with city officials. That seemed to satisfy them and I drove on, avoiding the glass and rubble that still littered the roads in some sections. A tram rail twisted by a bomb blast stuck up toward the sky on one street, illuminated only by a single light down the block.

The streets were deserted in this area and I was sorry I hadn't stayed more toward the center of the city. Once when I slowed the jeep to avoid some rubble, a young man detached himself from the shadows and spoke. "Cigarettes, mister?" he asked. I tossed him a half-empty pack and drove on.

Before I knew it, I'd reached the outskirts of the city, on the same familiar road I'd traveled with my father earlier that day, the library we'd visited straight ahead. Perhaps that had been my destination all along. I saw the staff car parked in front, its lights out, and I knew I'd found my father.

Parking the jeep about a hundred yards down the road, I approached the rest of the way on foot.

There was light burning on the second-floor balcony where the office was located. Standing across the street, I could see Hannah Peters pacing back and forth, talking to someone. Then my father came into view, standing very close to her.

He took her in his arms and kissed her.

My eyes were blurred with tears as I drove away from there. I felt he had betrayed me, as well as my mother back in London. Just then I wanted to run away from them both, but there was noplace to run. I ended up returning the jeep to the motor pool and climbing into my bunk. It must have been near dawn when I heard my father return, moving silently so as not to waken me. I listened to the squeak of his bunk and wondered if I hated him . . .

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At breakfast in the officers' mess, he acted as if nothing had happened, serving himself bacon and eggs from the buffet as he did every morning.

"I looked for you after the film," I said as we ate.

"I was restless. Went for a ride around the post, had a couple of drinks at the Officers' Club."

"I thought you might have driven into the city."

"No."

"What's on the schedule for today?" I asked.

"We have a meeting with the Mayor and the chief librarian of Dusseldorf at ten o'clock at Military Government Headquarters."

"That should be exciting," I said sarcastically.

He raised his eyebrows. "You knew what this was going to be when you asked to come along, Jeff."

Not really, I almost replied, but kept silent instead. There'd be time enough later for voicing my opinions.

The HQ of Dusseldorf's Military Government was located in a huge red-brick building that stretched around three sides of a square near the center of the city. It was quite modern compared with the rest of the downtown area. Inside, there were polished stone floors and handsome chrome fixtures, setting off the warm walnut furnishings.

The Mayor turned us over at once to the chief librarian, a tall Prussian type of man, with a withered left hand that must have kept him out of military service. His name was Carl Hesse, and his dislike of my father and me was obvious. "Frankly, gentlemen, I never expected to be sitting here negotiating for the reopening of our libraries and schools," he said at the outset.

"The schools will reopen next month," my father told him. "The libraries may open even sooner if you cooperate with us. We need the personnel files of your librarians and to inspect the libraries themselves. All Nazi titles must be removed."

"Surely we may keep them for study and reference."

"University libraries will have the books available if needed for such purposes."

"Very well," Hesse answered with some reluctance. "And the files? Do you want only the city libraries or those in the towns as well?"

"We are calling individually on regional libraries. My son and I met with Hannah Peters and Dr. Fredericks yesterday. We'll return there after lunch today."

"Ah, yes. What did you think of Dr. Fredericks?"

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My father's eyes narrowed. "He seemed knowledgable. I was more interested in Hannah Peters. What can you tell me about her?"

"I can tell you she has no love for the English. Her parents were killed in a bombing early in the war."

I shot my father a glance but his expression didn't change. "Is that so? I found her most cooperative."

"Will their library be allowed to open?"

"I expect so. We'll know better after today."

"And the city libraries?"

"If you can have those personnel files for me, we can begin checking them in the morning. We're especially anxious to weed out all Nazi Party members."

Carl Hesse nodded. "I understand. The Mayor has instructed me to cooperate fully." His tone of voice indicated it was not his preference.

My father rose and shook hands, signaling an end to the meeting. At that moment the telephone rang on Hesse's desk. He answered it and frowned, then held up his withered left hand to keep us from leaving. "I will tell them," he said and hung up.

"Was that a message for us?" my father asked.

"It was the Mayor. He has just heard from the military police that Dr. Fredericks has been found murdered, his body dumped on the side of a country road near here."

We drove there at once, escorted by a military-police jeep sent out from British headquarters. Our destination was a wooded area south of the city, along the east bank of the Rhine. I could see a number of official vehicles already at the spot as we pulled up. A criminal-investigation officer, Captain Bridlington, was in charge. "Thank you for coming so quickly," he told my father. "We're mainly interested in your identification of the body. I understand you met with Dr. Fredericks yesterday."

"That's correct," my father told him.

Captain Bridlington walked over to the side of the road and lifted the blanket that covered the body. It was Fredericks, all right. There were at least two wounds in his chest, but his face was untouched. "Shot at close range," the captain told us after my father had confirmed the identification. "We think it was the work of the Werewolf movement, the Nazi underground."

Although the war in Europe had been over less than four months, there were already reports surfacing about Werewolf activities.

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Heinrich Himmler had mentioned the movement in a speech the previous October, while the war still raged, and the suggestion was made that the SS should go underground rather than surrender, joining the Werewolf to fight the Allied invaders. Though the threat never amounted to more than a few random acts of terrorism and assassination, it was taken seriously by the occupying forces at that time in West Germany.

"Why would the Werewolf kill a party member like Dr. Fredericks?" my father wanted to know.

"Perhaps because he was no longer a loyal party member," Captain Bridlington suggested. "I understand he was cooperating with you in the reopening of his library. They killed the Mayor of Aachen for cooperating."

We watched while the body was loaded into an Army ambulance and taken away, then suddenly my father said, "We must get to Hannah Peters. Her life could be in danger, too."

Her car was parked in front of the library and we found her inside, dusting books and arranging them on the shelves. She smiled when she saw my father. "I have bad news," he announced gravely. He told her about Dr. Fredericks.

"My God! The poor man! When did it happen?"

"Sometime during the night, they think. They suspect the Werewolf underground. I came to warn you. They may have targeted both of you for cooperating with me."

She bent her head at his concern. "I can take care of myself."

I found myself shutting off the conversation and studying Hannah Peters with a new awareness. I knew from the personnel records that she was twenty-eight years old, and with her brown hair loose as it was today she looked even younger. She might have been someone with whom I'd shared a class at university.

"We should finish checking these books," my father said. "Once the library is open and we've moved elsewhere, the threat might lessen." He stepped close to her to read the titles and I saw her hand linger on his arm for just an instant. I walked around to the other side of the bookcase, unable to face my father.

On the way back to the base, driving a bit faster than he should, my father said, "I'm giving it my approval. They're certified for reopening."

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"They?" I said, a bit harsher than I'd intended. "It's only her now. Fredericks is dead."

He glanced at me, then back at the road. "What's that supposed to mean, Jeff?"

"Maybe she killed him. Maybe she's part of this Werewolf underground."

"I don't think she could have killed him," my father answered carefully. "She was at the library about the time of the killing."

"How could you know that? Because you were with her last night?"

He seemed shocked at my words, and pulled the car over to the side of the road. "Jeff, I didn't realize—"

"I took one of the motor-pool jeeps and went out looking for you last night. I drove out to the library. I saw you kissing her near the window. Are you going to deny it?"

"No. I wish you'd understand, though. Sometimes there are things you have to do."

"Like sleeping with young German women? You did sleep with her, didn't you?"

"Jeff—"

"Just answer me, tell me the truth!"

He sighed and sat gripping the steering wheel, staring straight ahead. "Yes, I slept with her," he said at last. "I'm not excusing it. I hope someday you'll understand."

"Understand what? That there's a war on? In case you hadn't noticed, the war is over."

"Your mother—"

"Don't mention her!"

"All right," he said, starting the motor again.

Both of us were silent for the rest of the ride. There seemed nothing either of us could say without making matters worse. Finally, as we drew up in front of our barracks, I asked, "Are we through with her now?"

He ignored the implications of my remark. "I've certified the library for reopening. Tomorrow we'll work on the city libraries."

"All right." I climbed out of the car and walked away without another word. I felt like being alone just then. As I walked aimlessly about the camp, I gradually decided what I had to do.

There was no doubt in my mind that Hannah Peters was involved in the murder of Dr. Fredericks by the Werewolf underground. It was more than happenstance that he was dead and she was alive, when both had been cooperating with the occupying forces. Even if

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she hadn't pulled the trigger herself, she was involved—and I intended to prove it. I borrowed the jeep from the motor pool again and drove back into the city, heading for the Military Government Headquarters. This time I bypassed the Mayor and sought out Carl Hesse, the chief librarian we'd seen earlier. He seemed surprised at my return and said, "Jeff Rand, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. My father sent me to do a little more digging into the records. He's especially interested in Dr. Fredericks' library."

Hesse stroked his chin. "You understand that my regular office at the main library was destroyed in the bombing. They have given me a bit of space here only until other arrangements can be made. Many of my records no longer exist. However, the library which interests you was never part of the city system. I have no records of their operations because they were an independent repository funded directly by the state."

"It stands to reason that people working directly for the state would be more loyal to it," I suggested. "We know Dr. Fredericks was a party member—"

"But not a Nazi. Believe me, there was a difference."

"What about Hannah Peters? You said her parents were killed in a British bombing. Is she the sort to have ties to an underground resistance group like the Werewolves?"

"I doubt it very much," he said. "I've seen nothing to indicate she was politically active at any time in her career."

That wasn't what I'd been hoping for, but it didn't discourage me. After I left, I telephoned Captain Bridlington, pretending I was acting on my father's behalf. "He was wondering if you have the autopsy report on Dr. Fredericks."

"It's too soon for anything but preliminaries. What was it that interested your father?"

"The time of death."

"Well, the doctor made a rough estimate of that. He thinks death occurred in the early evening, not more than two hours after Fredericks had dinner. However, the body could not have been dumped where we found it until shortly before dawn—the patrols would have spotted it earlier. It was at the edge of the highway, in view of car headlights."

"Thank you, Captain. I'll pass the word on to my father."

I hung up the phone and went back to the jeep. I had no intention of passing anything on to my father. I was going to confront Hannah Peters myself . . .

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I parked some distance from the library, near where I'd left the jeep the previous evening. Now it was daylight, however, and I could see Hannah's battered pre-war car standing by the side of the building. If she were to look out the window, she could see me, too. The air was damp after a brief shower, and the grass beneath my feet was wet as I cut across the lawn to the library entrance.

When I knocked at the locked door, I heard her voice from within. "We're not open yet. Come back on Friday."

"This is Jeffery Rand," I called. "Charles's son."

There was silence and then I heard the bolt being slid open. "What brings you here?" she asked. "Where is your father?"

"I wanted to talk to you alone."

She seemed to be dusting and sorting books, as she'd been doing when we brought her the news of Dr. Fredericks' murder. Pushing the hair from her eyes, she faced me and asked, "What about?"

I tried to keep my mind on what I was there for, to forget that this was a woman who'd slept with my father. "I wanted to ask you more about the death of Dr. Fredericks. My father believes you couldn't have been involved because you were here at the library all evening. Is that correct?"

"Involved?" she repeated. "How could anyone think I was involved? Dr. Fredericks and I worked together for years. He taught me everything I know." She picked up a few books.

"The military command suspects the Werewolf underground."

"That's insane. There have been no Werewolf incidents in this area. And even if they are involved, how would that implicate me? My file must show that I'm a very non-political person."

"Hear me out," I insisted. "Fredericks was killed within a couple of hours of eating dinner. But the body was not dumped at the side of the road until almost dawn. Why did his killer wait so long, risking discovery? And why was the body left so close to the road?"

"You seem to be doing the talking," she said.

"I know my father was here with you last night. I saw you together through the window. I think you shot Fredericks earlier, probably hiding his body in your car. But you couldn't drive it away while my father was here. You made love to him to lull his suspicions, then sent him home toward dawn so you could dispose of the body along the highway before daybreak. You didn't have the strength to carry it into the woods, so you had to leave it by the roadside."

"I see! You are a regular boy detective. Your mother must be so proud of you."

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At the mention of my mother, all reason seemed to leave me. In a moment of blind anger, I lashed out at her, knocking the books from her hands. "What are you trying to do?" she gasped.

Suddenly the floor was strewn with money, British five-pound and ten-pound notes cascading from inside the books. I stared, unable to grasp what was happening. "What is this?" I said finally.

"I'm sorry you had to see it," she told me. "I didn't want to kill you, too."

Then I saw the little automatic pistol which must have been on the desk behind her. I saw the eye of its barrel pointed at me, saw her trigger finger whiten, and knew that I was going to die because I'd been stupid and foolish. I'd only partly solved the mystery and now I was going to die for my mistake.

Someone coughed gently from the next room and an expression of surprise spread over Hannah Peters' face. She died standing there, aiming her gun at my head. I saw it happen, my father in the doorway behind her. Then I doubled over and was sick to my stomach.

Somehow he got me out into the car and started driving. "The jeep—" I said.

"We'll have it picked up."

"You killed her! She's dead!"

"Don't think about it now, Jeff. Everything will be all right."

"All right? How will it be all right? How did you get there? What were you doing with that gun with a silencer on it?"

"There's a lot to explain, Jeff. We'll talk it over later when you're feeling better."

"I want to talk about it *now,*" I told him, my voice shaking.

He pulled down a side road and parked.

"You can't just kill someone and go off and leave them like that," I said, trying to gain control of myself.

"Everything will be taken care of," he assured me. "I didn't intend to kill her, but it was your life or hers. I had no choice."

"She was the woman you loved!"

He shook his head. "No, Jeff. She was never that."

"But—"

"I'd better tell you exactly what happened. I arrived in time to hear you accuse her of Dr. Frederick's murder, and your reconstruction was fairly accurate as far as it went. But this was not a Werewolf plot. Our first visit to the library yesterday revealed the most im-

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portant clue, a German edition of *All Quiet on the Western Front.* A strong anti-war novel such as that is hardly the type of book you'd expect to find in a German library. In fact, Hitler ordered all of Remarque's books burned when he took office in nineteen thirty-three. He even stripped Remarque of his German citizenship in nineteen thirty-eight. It's impossible that the book could have been there. You'll remember we were told that no new books had been received since the end of the war."

"But we saw it," I protested.

"We saw something that looked like a book. I went back last night to see what it really was. That's when Hannah Peters caught me. I had to have an excuse for being at the library, so I said I'd returned to see her. One thing led to another."

"You say it so—so—"

"Casually? Coldly? I had a job to do. Sometimes deceit is necessary to accomplish a serious goal. Much is permitted in the service of one's country."

It was beginning to dawn on me. "When you were at the Paris embassy, were you a spy?"

"I hate that word," he told me.

"That gun with the silencer—"

"It was issued to me. I carried it for many years, and I used it when necessary."

"You followed me to the library today."

"I had to. I had no idea what you might do."

"The money that was in the book—"

"Counterfeit, all of it. Hitler printed up millions of pounds in counterfeit money to use for an invasion of England. Later the money was used for other purposes—to pay agents in the field, to destabilize our currency. Hannah's library was one of the storehouses for this money, hidden inside fake, hollowed-out books. Since the books weren't real, someone must have decided it didn't matter what titles were on the spines. Somehow that one got out on the shelf and I suppose Fredericks noticed it, too. He must have spoken to Hannah about it after we left. Perhaps she had her own plans for all that money, counterfeit or not. Anyway, she shot him shortly before I arrived last night and hid his body in her car. After I left her early this morning, she dumped him along the highway. You were right about all that."

"How do you know she wanted the money for herself?"

"An educated guess. She was collecting some of the fake books

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when you arrived. But I didn't see the Remarque among them. I think she had already moved quite a few away, probably to her house or apartment."

"That really is a guess."

"Not so much as you'd think. When we went there earlier, her car was parked in front of the library. This time it was by the side of the building. She'd moved it, gone somewhere and come back, perhaps parked less obviously so she could load the books without being seen from the street."

I shook my head in wonderment. "How do you notice all these things?"

"Training. You could do it, too."

"I could never deceive anyone. I could never make love to someone without meaning it." My words were cruel because I meant them to be. "I could never lie to my own son."

"I didn't mean to lie to you, Jeff."

"Does Mother know what you do? Does she know you're a spy? Does she know you can use a silenced pistol?"

"Perhaps you'd better ask her that question," he suggested.

Rand stopped talking and sat for a time staring into the fire.

"Did you ask her?" Leila said.

"No, somehow I never got around to it. When we returned to England, I went off to Oxford. Nothing more was ever said about Hannah Peters or what happened at the library. And to my knowledge nothing ever appeared in the newspapers about it. Someone did a good job of cleaning up the traces after our departure. By the time I finished Oxford my father had died. He didn't live long enough to see me go into intelligence work, but I know he would have approved."

"Did you keep your promise about never deceiving anyone? About never making love to someone without meaning it?"

"Come here," Rand said, gently pulling her down onto the rug by the fire. "I could never do the things my father did. Perhaps that's why I chose to work in London rather than abroad. We were two different people, my father and I."

"But something about his life held a fascination for you or you wouldn't have gone into intelligence work. Perhaps you weren't as different as you thought."

Gazing into the fire, Rand knew that she was right.

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Sometimes when Jenny watched her own students, when she saw what someone like Lynn Thomas could do with clay, giving it life and beauty and an excitement Jenny hadn't imagined, she thought she could understand what it had been like for Leonard Harris to teach her all those years ago . . .

ONLY CLAY

by LORRAINE COLLINS

Fire does awesome, unpredictable things and I have never been absolutely certain what I will find when I open the kiln. There are wonderful surprises sometimes, and terrible disappointments, but that's the way all art is, and all life. A copper reduction glaze fired at 2400 degrees is like the human spirit subjected to something similar, to fury and pain. The result may be luminescent purity or something ugly, something that can only be destroyed.

It can take me sixteen hours to fire a kiln, waiting for the temperature to rise high enough, controlling the atmosphere, constantly going out from my house to the kiln to monitor the propane torches that feed the flame. It might be two o'clock in the morning before it's finished, and sometimes when I walk out toward the barn which has been my studio for nearly twenty years, the stars are so bright in the wide night sky they look like pinpoints of fire. After I turn off the flame, I go to bed and sleep for hours. I have to wait for the cooling down before I can open the door of the kiln, dislodge the fire bricks, and peer anxiously inside.

It is a long process, but in terms of discovering what the fires of life have done to a human being, how he has reacted to the forces of ambition and pride and hunger for fame, it has taken me much longer. By now I am more than halfway through the evolution from

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being a slender girl to becoming a wiry old lady, and it has taken me this long. But I saw Leonard Harris today for the first time in two decades and, seeing him, I knew he should not have come.

"Jenny, you look wonderful," he said, smiling. "Still marvelous." I wondered what I did look like in work clothes—clay-covered jeans, old shirt, worn tennis shoes. When I last saw him he was a lean, strong man with a neatly trimmed curly black beard and intense blue eyes, and I thought I could die for him. When he drove down my lane today and got out of his car I was very surprised, but I recognized him at once. He was wearing dark glasses, so I couldn't see his eyes, and there was grey in the beard. He wore a tweed jacket, despite the heat of the afternoon, maybe to disguise the bulge of soft belly straining the buttons on his shirt. Still, he looked smooth, sophisticated, handsome, and I was almost shy. It was only when he kissed me lightly on the cheek and took my hand in a limp tentative greeting that I realized what a flimsy man he had become, brittle as bisque. I couldn't imagine that he had ever been my lover, that I had ever wanted to give him everything—everything! And that he took it.

He couldn't take anything from me now. He could have been strong from wedging his own clay, kicking a wheel, rebuilding a kiln, stacking and restacking it, mixing glazes, moving hundred-pound sacks of clay around, but he hadn't done that in years. So he was no match for me. And I've been chopping wood for my fireplace, too, and working in my garden and shoveling a path to the mailbox in winter. Anyone contrary enough to live alone on a farm and to work as a potter stays strong, because there is no other way to stay.

Leonard Harris—editor, critic, influential and important man in the world of ceramics—was never a real working potter and he quit teaching more than a decade ago. I never envied him his literary life, and I thought before he came here today that I had long ago given up hating him. I've led a modest, happy life. I love my farm, with the fields stretching out toward the horizon where the foothills rise to meet the mountains. I love my work and love the students who come here to my studio to learn what I can teach them. I have eight students right now—three quite good, one brilliant. Teaching Lynn Thomas has been worth a lifetime of waiting. She is everything I might have been, had I not chosen so foolishly when I was young.

I tried to be cordial to Leonard at first, casual. I smiled and said, "You're a long way from New York, aren't you? On your way to the Jackson Lake affair, I'm sure."

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We came up on the porch and I waved him into the wicker rocker. "Iced tea? I'll get it. Sit down, Leonard, look around at my farm."

When I came out with the tall glasses of tea, he was gazing out toward the barn and corral. "Do you actually raise anything here, Jenny? Cattle?" His tone was amused, patronizing.

I told him of the efficient young man who rents my land to raise hay and corn. "He feeds a few head of cattle, and I bought ten sheep. He takes care of the sheep, too. They're all out in the pasture right now." I sat down in a chair opposite Leonard.

"My studio is there in the barn. I have the kiln next to it in what used to be the chickenhouse. You should take a look at it after a while. I'm about to fire." I sipped my tea and watched Leonard, waiting for him to say why he was here. It's possible to get from the Cody airport to the Tetons without passing by my place. He had rented a car and come here for some purpose. Leonard Harris always had a purpose. It was the last thing I had found out about him twenty years or more ago.

"This was your family place? The old homestead?" He smiled and took the dark glasses off, rubbing the bridge of his nose. The blue of his eyes had faded, or perhaps it was merely passion—his or mine—that made them seem so dark and intense twenty or more years ago.

"Yes. The family place."

When I first knew Leonard, he teased me about it—a farm girl wanting to be an artist. Hardly any education at all, no background but a few semesters at a college of no consequence. Twenty-seven years old and just beginning to understand who I was, what I wanted to do with my life besides being the bookkeeper for the Co-op. Yet I won the scholarship and spent all one glorious summer at the Foundation in New York, working in a real studio, with others just as fascinated and eager as I, studying with a real artist, a real teacher, Leonard Harris.

He was establishing a reputation already—experimenting, innovating—but nothing had quite worked out and he wasn't famous yet, wasn't the great arbiter of taste and setter of trends he became a few years later. When he left the Foundation, he stopped making pots altogether. He was busy enough without actually doing the work.

Sometimes when I watch my own students, when I see what someone like Lynn Thomas can do with clay, giving it life and beauty and an excitement I hadn't imagined, I think I can understand what

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it was like for Leonard Harris to teach me, how surprised he was. We didn't know then that this was to be my life, sustaining me through everything that has happened ever since. I thought it was just going to be a wonderful summer, a holiday, but at the Foundation he and I discovered my talent and my vision, my will. And after that summer, he let me share his studio—just the two of us working there, privately, for two years. It made all the difference in my life, and I was so grateful to him for such a long time.

"You lead quite a reclusive life here, Jenny. You never come to New York. I never see you at the big shows—I look for you." He tried to smile. "You're not even registered at Jackson Lake. Almost your own back yard. I thought you'd be there."

"Why?"

He quit pretending to smile. He was nervous. "I've seen the work of some of your students. You're becoming quite—famous as a teacher, you know. Soon everybody will want to come out to Wyoming to study with Jenny Cotter." What, I thought—what? "You have one student—Lynn Thomas."

My heart leaped right up in my throat. What did he want with her?

"She wrote to me about you. She thought we should do an article about you, your work, your teaching. She's really devoted to you. She said you should be—famous." He was looking at me cautiously, as though I might explode. I almost laughed. I couldn't believe it—Lynn writing to Leonard Harris about me, talking about fame.

"Did she send you some slides of my work?"

"Yes. —Jenny, I did write to you, years ago. I did try to—explain. You didn't answer."

No, I hadn't. I sat still and said nothing.

He took a deep breath. "I answered Lynn's letter, and talked to her when she came to the exhibit in Santa Fe. I don't suppose she told you. I asked her not to. She's a very talented young woman. She'll be—very important someday."

I tried to imagine Lynn talking to Leonard in Santa Fe and not coming back to bounce enthusiastically into my studio, saying, "You wouldn't guess who I saw!" Eyes sparkling, ponytail flying as she whirled around, acting it out. She should have said, "I saw the great man in person!" She should have laughed and told me how wonderful, or how disappointing, it was. That was how Lynn reported on the exhibits and meetings she attended.

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Leonard tried to smile again. "I asked her not to tell you because I thought maybe I should—talk to you myself. She's very determined to bring you—public recognition. Your work really is—good. And you've just exhibited in, uh—Billings and Casper?"

It was funny to see him so frightened, so worried. When I first told him all those years ago that I loved him, he took me in his arms and caressed me so tenderly that I ached with longing and gratitude. He whispered, "Bless you, bless you, Jenny Cotter." I've never forgotten that. We were lovers for almost two years until he told me I had to leave.

Being young and foolish, I didn't blame him, or argue with him, or doubt his good judgment. It was his wife and career or me, and who was I? His wife held his future in her hands—his bank account, his respectability. Of course I understood that, and I thought that whatever sacrifices I made were worth it for him.

Still, I tried to kill myself, and smashed most of the pots I had made in those two years. Nearly every one.

"Yes, we should talk," I said, remembering how my father came to get me, the only time he ever crossed the Mississippi River in his lifetime. He bought a new stationwagon and drove it all the way to New York State, got me out of the hospital, and drove me home. I lay in the back on a foam cushion and watched the sky and the tops of the trees and billboards of seven states before we were safely home. I was thirty-two years old before I was well again. My father died when I was thirty-seven. He's buried next to my mother's grave, not far from here in a little prairie cemetery where Indian-paintbrush decorates the graves.

"Yes," I said. "You must have something important to say, Leonard. Don't be afraid to say it. I'm not young and crazy any more. I'm really very strong. What is it you want?"

He said nothing, so I said it for him. "Is it the pots I made in your studio? The ones I didn't smash? The ones I'd already given you to take to the house you lived in with your wife as a remembrance of me?"

"Jenny—"

"Don't look so anguished, Leonard. I'm just asking about pots, remember? They were only clay."

"Only clay!"

"Yes, they weren't flesh and blood, not even crystal or silver. Just clay, but unique. I've never made anything like them since. Nobody has, Leonard, isn't that so?"

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He sat up straight, drawing his body slowly up in the chair until his legs were no longer stretched comfortably out in front of him but were tucked tightly under the chair, close together, as though he was about to spring out of it.

"There were five or six of them," I said. "The first two or three appeared a year after I left, and the others the year after that. In the magazine you edit now. I saw them. The soaring, joyful forms, those subtle colors, the delicacy of them. And the porcelain one that was my favorite. They were all by Leonard Harris, the caption said. And you know, Leonard, I didn't care. I really didn't care."

He was still as death, pale and quiet.

"Was that how you got your job, Leonard? I thought your wife had bought it for you."

"You vanished." His voice was tight. "I thought you were dead. Your father told me you were."

"They would have made a nice memorial, those pots," I said quietly.

But Leonard had claimed them as his own. He had built a reputation on them. When he made no more, he told the world the challenge and inspiration were no longer there, that creating those few pots had been like Schubert creating his Unfinished Symphony. To Schubert, it was finished. Everyone thought it was very romantic. It was the beginning of a trend that lasted for a while, and he had finally found something that worked, that captured the imagination, that made him a leader of style. He didn't have to make more of the pots because he could write about them instead.

It was three years before I worked with clay again myself, and I could never make those forms again. Eventually, I didn't want to. But I read about them. I read about the philosophical justification of the form, and the spirit they encapsulated, and the innovation they represented, and the subsequent theories based on them, and the evolution of the movement, and the various arguments that developed. Leonard himself came to repudiate them and to say that they represented a dead-end in art, that they had been a passing fancy. He said he had moved beyond them. It was amazing the influence Leonard had built based on less than half a dozen of the pots I made more than twenty years ago, and the magazine he was able to buy.

"When did you find out I wasn't dead?" I asked him. "How many years ago?"

"It was too late by then."

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"Yes, I suppose it was. But weren't you surprised that I never complained? Never sued you? Weren't you afraid?"

"Yes." His voice was tight.

"Perhaps you thought I still loved you. Or that I wasn't a potter any more and wouldn't read the magazines."

"I—wondered. Until so many years went by I began to believe the myth myself. Until Lynn Thomas sent me those slides. Why *didn't* you do something?"

I couldn't explain the depth of my despair and self-hatred, the bitterness that consumed me for so long. Or how I purged myself of it, and what peace I had found here on this farm. Such a small thing as a clay pot, such a small thing as a reputation, finally seemed unimportant here. My happiness had nothing to do with Leonard Harris or fame. I couldn't explain to him how irrelevant he was. I couldn't explain it, so I made a mistake.

I said, "Perhaps I just didn't need to, Leonard. Perhaps I just wasn't ready." I shouldn't have given in to that impulse, making him suffer and worry. I said, "I do see your problem, Leonard. Now I have one of the brightest and best young potters in the country right here. She's going to be famous someday. Her teacher might become famous, too. Is that what worries you, that there really might be people coming all the way to Wyoming to study with me? While I was alone out here, dead or alive, I was harmless, but now I might change my mind and tell everybody?"

He sat where he was without a twitch or a blink. Then he looked blankly at me and, as if he were talking to himself, said, "I can't afford to worry about it. I have a big project coming along. I have my reputation. I'm very influential. People listen to me. I can't be —humiliated." He was sweating so much I was going to make a joke of it, I was going to say, "For heaven's sake, take off your jacket, Leonard," but I didn't have a chance. I couldn't understand what he was doing at first when he reached into his coat pocket and brought out the gun.

I thought, This man wants to destroy me twice in one lifetime. Why would that be? Is his career that important? I sat up straighter, but I smiled. "You really are worried, then," I said, watching him carefully. "What on earth are you planning to do, Leonard?"

"Lynn Thomas knew I was coming here today. But I'll get here too late—after the robbery. After you're killed in a robbery. I'll call her. I'll be upset."

"But isn't that—dangerous?" It was such a silly word to use.

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"There's no connection between us, Jenny. You were just somebody at the Foundation one summer years ago, one of hundreds. And the Foundation doesn't exist any more—"

He wasn't ready when I bolted out of my chair and flew at him. We fell over his chair and wrestled for only a minute or two. I don't know exactly what happened. He never did fire a shot. Was there ever a moment when I could have stopped hitting him and screaming, slamming his head on the floor? Or was there too much fury, after all, too many years of pain? When I stopped hitting him at last, I didn't know whether he was dead or alive. I didn't care.

I sat on the porch floor, leaning against the wall for a long time, at last able to breathe more easily as I watched the shadows spreading across the fields and heard the first bird songs of the evening. I couldn't think what to do at first. I couldn't imagine ever telling Lynn—she brought him here, how could she live with that? And I thought of all the questions and the terrible publicity, and I didn't want any of it.

I have no desire to protect the reputation of Leonard Harris, but I desire to protect myself—and Lynn Thomas. And he was right. There is no connection between us.

I've buried the gun in my garden. I've washed his blood from the floor of my porch. He is out in my kiln shack now, lying beside the propane burners that have fired so many glazes for me, cobalt and ochre and copper, reducing all to the elements, clearing impurities. I think he's still alive. The torches that have fired bisque and stoneware and porcelain so many times are ready and I've opened the valves on the fuel line. The gas is accumulating.

There will be an explosion, and a fire. I will explain that he was helping me, that he was going to light the kiln while I was out by the tank, turning the valve. I won't know exactly how it happened, but there must have been a leak.

I can't think of how else to do it but this way. Some pots will be destroyed, but they are only clay.

"Q"

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a Horace Rumpole story by

JOHN MORTIMER

It was suggested that a party should be made up of the Erskine-Browns, Henry the clerk (who, being by far the wealthiest, undertook to supply three or four bottles of champagne), Uncle Tom, and the Rumpoles. "We must go, Rumpole," Hilda said as soon as she heard of the invitation. "Daddy always went to the Bar Races . . ."

RUMPOLE AND THE SPORTING LIFE

by JOHN MORTIMER

"Rumpole," said She Who Must Be Obeyed over breakfast one morning in the mansion flat. "We're going to the Bar Races on Saturday, aren't we?" It was less a question than a statement of fact, less a statement of fact than a Royal command. It was no use protesting, for instance, that Rumpole has never been a racing man.

Claude Erskine-Brown, somewhat disappointed in his application for silk, had come to the conclusion that a more active part in the social life of the Bar might bring him to the attention of the powers that be. He joined the Bar Golfing Society, he put up for election to the Bar Council, and he decided that it would be just as well to be seen hobnobbing with those sporting judges who patronized the Bar Races. He decided to make up a party for this event, but Ballard, quite naturally, didn't approve of gambling, and Hoskins didn't want to lose his girls' school fees on a piece of fallible horseflesh. Accordingly, it was suggested that a party should be made up of the Erskine-Browns, Henry our clerk (who, being by far the wealthiest of

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us, undertook to supply three or four bottles of champagne), Uncle Tom, and the Rumpoles.

"We must go, Rumpole," Hilda said as soon as she heard of the invitation. "Daddy always went to the Bar Races."

I had a distant memory of attending this annual point-to-point with C. H. Wystan when he was Head of Chambers. We journeyed down to the Cotswolds in his large and hearselike motor, feasted on ham sandwiches and rock cakes, and the warmish hock flowed like cement. Once or twice, as I remember it, Hilda Wystan was in the party, and She would be in charge of the thermos and getting her father perched on his shooting stick in time to see the end of the Barristers' Handicap.

Over the course of the years, fewer barristers have been able to find the spare currency to keep horses in livery, being hard pushed to keep their nearest and dearest in regular feed and stabling. The Barristers' Races have therefore shrunk to one event in an afternoon of races for adjacent hunts and military sportsmen, but a few alcoholic juniors with a taste for hunting still put their mounts, like nervous clients, to various jumps and hazards, and a great many judges and barristers and barristers' wives dress up in old caps and trilby hats, tweeds, and green padded waistcoats, and consume, with icy fingers, large picnics from the boots of their motor cars and so join happily in the Sport of Kings.

"It'll be like the old days, won't it, Rumpole?" Hilda said as she daubed the ham sandwiches with mustard and wrapped them in greaseproof paper. "And it'll do you so much good to have a day out in the countryside." I was already marvelling at the English longing to journey vast distances to some damp and uncomfortable place and then, with none of the normal facilities such as knives and forks and dining-room furniture, eat a packed meal. I was busy storing as many bottles as possible of the Château Fleet Street into my red robe bag in the hope that I might, with their assistance, be able to keep out the cold.

We left London at a ridiculously early hour in the Erskine-Brown Volvo Estate. Phillida Erskine-Brown, Q.C., was wearing a sort of tweed cape and deerstalker, which gave her the curious appearance of a red-headed and personable female Sherlock Holmes. Claude, a great one for uniforms, was wearing the regulation padded waistcoat and green wellies. Uncle Tom sported an old hacking jacket with leather patches, and Henry wore a tweed suit with knife-edge creases, a sheepskin car coat, and had, slung about his neck, a huge

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pair of racing binoculars. You have the complete picture when I tell you that Hilda was in a tweed two-piece with brogues and a Burberry, and I was in the old Sunday jacket, cavalry-twill bags, and everyday mac. When we had all assembled in the street outside Froxbury Court, I piled my bag of booze and Hilda's sandwiches into the hatchback, as Henry rather quaintly called it, and it was tally ho and we were off to the races. A fine drizzle was falling then, and it went on falling for the rest of the day.

The point-to-point course was a fairly representative slice of the English countryside. There was a damp and distinct prospect of fields and hedgerows and a hillside on which the cars were parked and the bookies had set up their stands. The Mecca of the place, the large tent in which food and drink were supplied, had been pitched next to the saddling enclosure. I would have wished to spend most of the afternoon under canvas, but Hilda, encouraged by Phillida Erskine-Brown, who showed considerable sporting interest, insisted on trekking down to the rails to watch the finish of each race, and then climbing back to the bookies to put money on another loser.

My involvement with the sporting life, and the events which led to one of the most interesting murder cases of the Rumpole career (I put it not far below the Penge Bungalow affair in the list of my more engaging cases), started as we were watching the three o'clock race, in which members of the adjacent hunts contested the field with a few barristers. We were positioned near to the last fence as a bunch of riders, helmeted, goggled, and pounding through a cloud of flying mud, approached the high brushwood and flung their horses at it.

"Into the last fence now and it's Number 13, Atlantic Hero, owned and ridden by the Honourable Jonathan Postern of the Tester Hunt in the pink and green colors," the loudspeaker, crackling out a rasping commentary, informed us.

"Come on, Atlantic Hero! Don't hang about, Atlantic Hero!" Hilda was shouting lustily. For the first time in a long day it seemed that one of our party had backed a winner. What with the pounding of hooves and the shouts of the aficionados, I wasn't sure that Hilda's fancied animal could hear her. And then the last horse crashed through the brushwood, landed awkwardly, deposited its rider on the ground, and galloped off as though happy to be out of the contest.

"And there's another one down," the loudspeaker crackled. "Number 11, Tricycle. Ridden by Maurice Fishbourne of the Tester Hunt."

Two St. John ambulancemen with a stretcher were pounding out

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to the fallen rider as the victory of Atlantic Hero was announced, and Hilda sent up a resounding cheer. I looked around and saw a handsome woman in her early thirties, dressed in the regulation headscarf and padded waistcoat, running toward the fallen rider. My attention was held, I suppose, because her face seemed vaguely familiar. Her mouth was open as she ran, as though in a silent scream. And then I saw the horseless rider sit up and stretch out his hand for a pair of gold-rimmed glasses. One lens had been shattered in his fall. He seemed a slight, unsportsmanlike character, who smiled a nervous apology at the ambulancemen and then stood, unsteadily, hooking on his glasses. At this the woman in the headscarf stopped running, her mouth closed, and she turned quickly and walked away in the general direction of the refreshment tent.

"First, Number 13, Atlantic Hero. Second, Number 8, Flashpoint. Third, Number 4, Ironside—" the loudspeaker told us.

"Come along, Rumpole, for heaven's sake! We've got to collect my winnings." Hilda was triumphant.

"What did you have on it? One quid each way?" I asked her. "We shall be able to retire to Biarritz."

So our group started to plod up the hill, where the increasing rain was producing yet more mud. As we made our way to the old and reliable firm where Hilda proudly collected the fruits of 50 p. each way, Uncle Tom and Henry were discussing form for the 3:30, the Barristers' Handicap.

"His clerk tells me that Mr. Lorrimer's not all that fit," Henry was saying. "He's been overworking on his Revenue cases."

"Likely to fall at the first fence." Uncle Tom marked his race card and then asked, "Harley Waters, Q.C., in good condition, is he? Been taking his oats and all that?"

"Rather too liberally, his clerk informs me, sir. The fancy is," Henry lowered his voice confidentially, "Mr. E. Smith on Decree Absolute."

"Mr. Smith in good form, is he?" Uncle Tom sounded anxious.

"Teetotal, according to his clerk." Henry had no doubts. "And he does press-ups in Chambers."

When bets had been laid on various members of the Bar, we went into the tent, where Hilda was determined to fritter away her winnings on loose living and self-indulgence. I was bringing up the rear guard with Erskine-Brown when I heard a dry and elderly voice calling, "There you are, Rumpole! Ah, Erskine-Brown—" Claude immediately raised his hat and I turned to see the small, wrinkled,

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parchment-colored face, inappropriately crowned by a jaunty bowler hat, of Mr. Justice Twyburne, one of the old school of spine-chilling judges of the Queen's Bench, a man so old that he had been appointed before the age for retirement was inflicted on the Judiciary, and who stayed on—to the terror of unwary criminals and barristers alike.

"I haven't had you before me lately," said this antique judge. "I suppose you don't get the *serious* crime nowadays."

"I have been engaged elsewhere," I said loftily and looked toward the bar as an avenue of escape. "I must join my wife. She's spending the winnings."

"Been having a little flutter here, have you? I don't see you as a gambling man, Rumpole." The tent was full of horsy girls in well fitting jods and convivial farmers. It was my fate to be stuck with this daunting old codger.

"I suppose a person can't spend a lifetime in Old Bailey trials without getting a bit of a taste for games of chance," I told him.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Mr. Justice Twyburne clearly didn't like the analogy.

"Don't you ever feel that forecasting the results of cases is rather like sticking a pin in the *Sporting Life* with your eyes shut?" I asked him.

"The aim of an English criminal trial is to do justice," the judge said coldly. "I don't see how you can possibly compare it to a horse-race. Good day, Erskine-Brown." He touched the rim of his bowler with a yellow-gloved hand and went off to pass an adverse judgment on the animals in the saddling enclosure. When he had gone, Erskine-Brown looked at me as though I had failed to stand up during the National Anthem, or had been caught filling out my football pools while doing a case in the House of Lords.

"Rumpole!" he protested. "Twyburne's our oldest judge."

"I know," I answered him with some distaste. "One of the few survivors who's ever passed a death sentence. They say he ordered muffins at his Club after those occasions."

And then the rider of Atlantic Hero and the author of Hilda's good fortune came into the tent, recognizable to us by his green and pink silks and his white, mud-splattered riding breeches as well as the silver cup he was carrying. He was followed by a considerable retinue, including at least two pretty girls, a tall young man with longish hair and an amused expression, and, bringing up the rear, the woman who had run with such distress toward the fallen rider.

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As the crackling loudspeaker had told us, the victor of the three o'clock (the Adjacent Hunts Challenge Cup) was Jonathan Postern. I was watching as the Hon. Jonathan slapped his silver trophy down on the bar and shouted to one of the fresh-faced waitresses who had just served drinks to Hilda.

"Come on, sweetheart. Fill this jerry up with champers!"

"A loving cup—Jonno, how excessively brill!" one of the pretty girls chirruped as she held the arm of the winning rider. My attention was momentarily engaged by Hilda handing me a small rum. A bit of a disappointment, I thought. With her luck I expected her at least to fill my gum boots with champagne. As I sank my nose toward the rum, I heard the dulcet tones of Miss Fiona Allways greeting Hilda and the Erskine-Browns. She was dressed like most of the other girls in a padded waistcoat, green cord trousers, a sweater, and the sort of man's flat cap which charladies used to wear.

"I see you're in uniform too, Fiona," I greeted her. "All you khaki figures, slogging through the mud to the encampment, put me in distinct mind of the retreat from Mons."

"You were never at the retreat from Mons," Erskine-Brown told Fiona—unnecessarily, I thought. "Rumpole was in the R.A.F. Ground Staff. Weren't you, Rumpole?"

"All right. It puts me in mind of the Naafi at R.A.F. Dungeness after a heavy night," I was saying, when the woman I had seen rushing to the fallen rider came up to greet Fiona. Then I knew why I had thought there was a familiar look to her.

"Hullo, Pimpsey," the woman said.

"Oh, hi, Sprod," Fiona answered.

"Disgusting to see you," said the woman, and I made the somewhat obvious comment, "You two obviously know each other."

"My big sister, Jennifer Postern. This is Rumpole, Mrs. Rumpole," Fiona introduced us.

"How riveting!" Jennifer turned to me. "I've heard so much about you. Pimpsey says you got her into Chambers. By some miracle!"

"Well, it was one of my trickier cases," I admitted.

"Oh, but Pimpsey says you win them all, because you're the most super barrister in the whole of England. Absolutely brill, thinks Pimpsey."

"Did you come on your own, Fiona?" Claude had moved away from his wife and was asking Fiona a quiet and hopeful question.

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"No. With my boy friend, Jeremy Jowling. He's rather dull, but he *is* a solicitor. He's the one doing the serious drinking."

We looked across to the group by Jonathan Postern. Jeremy Jowling appeared to be the longish-haired, amused young man who had just received a dark-brown whisky. Hilda recognized her favorite rider's racing colors then and trumpeted loudly, "Oh look—that's my gorgeous winner!"

"I say, your wife. Is she really the one you call She Who Must—" Jennifer whispered to me.

"No. She's the one I call 'Mrs. Rumpole,' " I answered. Hilda was, after all, almost within earshot. But her attention was still on the young man in racing silks.

"Rumpole! That's the chap who won for me. On Atlantic Hero," she told me once again. I looked at the winner and realized how remarkably handsome he was. He had close-cropped curly hair and a straight nose, putting me in mind of those Greek statues in which the eyelids are somehow heavy with exhaustion at maintaining the heroic pose. If Jonathan Postern looked like some minor antique deity, he was surrounded by his votive priestesses. As he drank from the huge silver cup, a number of girls kissed him, none of whom was his wife.

"Such a nice-looking young man. Do you know him?" Hilda said admiringly to Jennifer, who answered,

"He's my husband."

"Oh, really? I do feel I should thank him personally."

"Come on then. Why don't we whizz over?"

So our group moved over toward Jonathan Postern's celebration.

Hilda, flushed with her winnings and a small rum, engaged the hero in conversation at once.

"I just had to say 'Well done.' It does make a day at the races so much more thrilling when you're on a winner!"

"Were you? I can't say I saw you," Jonathan answered, and then said, in a loud aside to one of the attendant maidens, "Who are these amazing old wrinklies?"

"This is Mr. and Mrs. Rumpole, Jonno. And Mr. Claude Erskine-Brown." Fiona looked at him disapprovingly.

"Mr. Rumpole's a *tremendous* legal eagle," Jennifer Postern explained to her husband.

"My God! You're not one of the galloping barristers?" the Hon. Jonathan asked me.

"Hardly."

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"None of your lot got placed. Terribly bad luck." He raised the chalice. "Care for a swig?"

"Thank you."

I might have saved my thanks, for I never got a drink. At that moment the rider who fell, the man whose name the loudspeaker had given as Maurice Fishbourne, muddy and with his glasses broken, came into the tent and was peering round with a look of short-sighted amiability. Jonathan raised the cup and had a long refreshing drink, ignoring me.

"Thank you very much," I muttered.

Jonathan lowered the cup and, still holding it, looked across at Fishbourne and called, "Fishface!"

"He's cutting us dead!" one of the maidens said.

"He's being frightfully grand," said another.

"Come on, Fish. Don't be weedy!" a red-haired girl in a hacking jacket shouted.

Fishbourne came toward them, smiling in a hopelessly ingratiating way. Hilda, who was in a mood to greet anyone, greeted him. "Good afternoon."

"Oh, this is Maurice Fishbourne. He lives next to Jennifer and Jonno." Fiona was keeping her head admirably in a difficult social situation.

"D-delighted to meet you." Fishbourne came toward us, grinning weakly. His stammer seemed as much part of his character as his broken spectacles.

"How did you manage to stick on till the last fence, Fishy? Superglue?" Jonathan bayed at him, and the entourage laughed.

"He was hanging onto the mane. I saw him!" It was Jennifer Postern, joining in.

"C-congratulations, Jonathan." The man Fishbourne seemed to be perfectly civil.

"Oh, aren't you a lovely loser! If you want to ride something in the next race, why not try a bicycle?"

Once again the claque laughed at Jonathan Postern's sally, and once again Jennifer joined in.

"I'm not r-riding in the next race." Fishbourne smiled round at the laughing faces.

"Is Mummy taking you home to tea?" Again, to my surprise, it was Jennifer who asked the question. It didn't sound kindly meant.

"I'm driving Mother home, yes, Jennifer." Fishbourne looked at her through his broken lens.

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"Come on, Fishy. Have a slug of champers!" Jonathan Postern invited him.

"Oh. Th-thanks." Fishbourne took the chalice.

"It's quite all right, only got all our germs in it," one of the girls said.

Fishbourne smiled and started to drink. Jonathan knocked the bottom of the cup, sending a wave of champagne over Fishbourne's face and down his neck. He emerged wet and still grinning to look round at his tormentors as though delighted to afford them all a little harmless fun.

At the next memorable breakfast we shared at Froxbury Court, I noticed, in a state of considerable shock, that Hilda was reading *Country Life*. Not only did she read it to herself, she gave me a nugget from this strange periodical.

" 'Lodge for sale on gentleman's estate in wooded country near Tester.' "

"Why are you reading that, Hilda?" I asked her. "Were there no *Daily Telegraphs?*"

" 'Three bedrooms, two receps, with access to good, rough shooting,' " she went on. "Doesn't that sound attractive, Rumpole?"

"I honestly think I have enough troubles in my life without you taking up rough shooting."

"What did you say?"

"I said it might be more peaceful in Tooting. Or in Gloucester Road. Or round the Inner London Sessions, or the Old Bailey. I mean, there you can go out for a walk without being in imminent danger of a charge of buckshot or whatever it is."

"Nonsense, Rumpole!" Hilda was flicking over glossy pages full of Georgian manor houses and sporting prints. "That day at the Bar Races made me realize what we're missing."

"Mud?" I suggested.

"The countryside, Rumpole! Now, if we sold our lease here—"

"We could buy a deer park, and a Palladian mansion. Fancy having your *Country Life* ironed by the butler?"

"Daddy always said that what a barrister needed was a place in the country," Hilda said with quiet dignity.

"Thirteen Acacia Road, Horsham. Wasn't that your Daddy's stately home?" I asked as I folded up *The Times*, preparing for my journey to the Temple.

"Can't you see us, Rumpole?" Hilda began to look distinctly

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dreamy. "Sitting by a log fire, taking a glass of sherry, perhaps, as the sun sets over the home wood—"

"I see us with the boiler out and all trains to London cancelled—and mud up to your elbows." I stood up, gulping coffee. "And out in the home wood there's bound to be someone killing something."

Not long after that an elderly man called Figgis, who lived in a cottage in the woods on Jonathan Postern's Tester estate, heard a shot and a woman's cry. He ran out of his overgrown garden and, just outside his tangled hedge, propped up against a fallen tree, he saw the dead body of the rider and owner of Atlantic Hero. Standing not a dozen yards away from him and holding a shotgun was Fiona's sister, Jennifer. Figgis asked her what had happened and her answer was one that was going to prove a serious problem to her defending counsel.

"I did it," she said, and added, somewhat lamely, "It was an accident."

"Sprod wants you to defend her," Fiona said.

"That's because you've been giving your sister a quite exaggerated view of my abilities in matters of shotgun wounds, murder, and sudden death," I told her.

"Is it really possible to exaggerate your abilities?"

"Perhaps not," I said modestly.

"Why shouldn't my sister have the best counsel available?"

She sat down in my client's chair. I lit a small cigar and looked at her. She had rushed back from Court to see me when she heard the news. Still in her stiff white collar and bands, she looked absurdly young, like a distressed choirboy.

"Friends," I said.

"What?" She frowned, puzzled.

"One rule at the Bar, Fiona. Never appear for friends. Your judgment gets blurred. You care too much. You can't see the weaknesses in your own case. And if you lose, of course, they never, ever forgive you."

"My sister's not your friend. Quite honestly, you hardly know her."

"But I know you, Fiona." I hoped I sounded gentle.

"Of course, but—"

"All the trouble I had to get you in here! I did it by some pretty ruthless maneuvering, if you want to know the truth. And then to have to spend the rest of my life avoiding your eye in the clerk's

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room, ducking over to the other side of the road when I saw you walking back from the Bailey, and never feeling safe to pop into Pommeroy's for a strengthener in case I found you staring at me more in sorrow than in anger because I lost your sister's case. Life would be intolerable!"

"I do understand that," she admitted. "But—"

"But me no buts, Fiona," I said firmly.

"I was only going to say, 'But you're not going to lose it, are you?' "

So, in the course of time, and much against my better judgment, I found myself sitting in the corner of a railway carriage, studying a brief which contained a bundle of not uninteresting mortuary photographs. I was on my way to Tester Crown Court to play my part in the case of the Queen against Jennifer Postern.

In London you hardly ever see death, I thought, as I looked from the photograph of the wounded body of Jonathan Postern to the fields and woodlands, the streams and bridges, the greystone houses and farm buildings of the Cotswold countryside. Once or twice in a lifetime you may see an old-age pensioner, perhaps, collapsed on a cold night in the tube, or a shape under a blanket and a small crowd as you drive past an accident.

In that peaceful landscape they saw death every day. They watched hounds tearing foxes to pieces or coursing hares. They hung up magpies and jays in the woods as a warning to others. No doubt at the end of the garden I saw from the passing train there was some retired naval man tearfully putting down his dog. Death is a routine event in the country. Well, I asked myself, what's a husband more or less in the shooting season?

And then we were in the outskirts of a grey, stony town. The train gasped to a standstill and I heard a porter calling, "Tester! Change here for Deepside and Watching Junction."

When I got outside the station, burdened, as usual on my travels, with my suitcase, briefcase, and robe bag, I was hailed by the young man I had seen briefly in Jonathan Postern's entourage, and who had been pointed out as the boy friend of Miss Fiona Allways.

"Horace Rumpole!" he was calling as he tried to stuff an extremely large and melancholy-looking dog into the back seat of a battered sportscar. "Do hop in. I'm Jeremy Jowling, instructing you. Don't mind Agatha. She's a soppy old date really. Here, let me take your luggage." As we put my travelling wardrobe into his boot, I fitted myself with some difficulty into the sportscar. The front seat was

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covered with dog hairs and the Hound of the Baskervilles was breathing lugubriously down my neck.

"Where'd you like to go first," young Jowling said as he forced himself into the driver's seat and switched on the engine, "the Tester Arms or the prison?"

"Which is the least uncomfortable?" I asked him.

"I'd say the prison. Run you there, shall I? I must say it's all a G.M.B.U."

"G.M.B.U?" I asked, puzzled, as we roared off through the heart of Tester.

"Grand Military Balls-Up," he explained. "Years since we had a murder in the Tester Hunt. Well, it'll get those dotty blood-sports protestors going. Agatha! For God's sake, don't kiss Mr. Rumpole!"

I had, in fact, felt the slap of a warm tongue on the back of the neck. I leant forward and lit a small cigar. As he squeaked past a bus and slipped by as the light went red, I wondered how useful Fiona's swain would be in the coming trial.

"You're a partner?" I asked him.

"In Jowling and Leonard. My old man's firm, quite honestly. But he doesn't care for murder. So he handed this case on to me. 'Well, my boy,' he said. 'You may as well start at the bottom.' You knew Jonathan Postern at all?"

"Only momentarily."

"People round here had a tremendous lot of time for Jonno."

"I'm sorry." I meant it.

"What?"

"It's not what you need in a murder case, a well liked corpse."

"Well, you'd know about that, wouldn't you? Agatha! Don't kiss! I shan't tell you again! Only one trouble with Jonno Postern. He had a bad case of the M.T.F.s."

"The *what?*" The young man seemed to need a simultaneous translation.

"Must Touch Flesh. Particularly the flesh of Debbie Pavier. Well, that's what the row was all about, wasn't it? A Grand Military Shout-up. I mean, if it hadn't been for that, the constabulary might have taken Sprod's story about an accident and no questions asked."

"Debbie Pavier?" I asked. "Was she the girl who was kissing him in the tent at the races?"

"One of them, yes. All the girls were crazy about Jonno."

Tester Prison was a smallish Victorian castle not far from the center of town. Jennifer Postern had been brought up from Holloway

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and we sat in a small, dark interview room and I rummaged in my brief and asked her questions. She seemed remarkably calm and self-possessed. She had none of the prison pallor I was used to in my clients, but seemed to bring into the stuffy little room a fresh breeze from the countryside.

"It was an accident," she told me, as she had told the old man Figgis.

"Your housekeeper says you were quarreling with your husband that afternoon."

"Bit of a hangover. After some serious drinking the night before."

"Do you remember saying something about killing him?"

"Isn't it the sort of thing one says?" Jennifer asked with a smile.

"Is it?"

"Well, don't you quarrel sometimes with She Who—?"

"Happily, neither of us owns a shotgun." I meant it. "After the quarrel, your husband went out?"

"Jonno wanted a walk, I suppose. To cool off."

"And so did you?"

"Yes. I went out after he did."

"And you took your twenty-bore with you?"

"You know something about guns?" For the first time, I thought she looked a little worried.

"A little. Why did you take it?"

"I thought it might calm my nerves if I shot something."

"Not the most tactful way of explaining your feelings to the jury." I ground out the end of a small cigar on the tin ashtray on the table.

"I meant rough shooting. A rabbit, perhaps, or a pigeon, or—"

"The gun was loaded when you met your husband in the wood?"

"Of course."

"And the safety catch?"

"I put up a pheasant and I was about to have a shot, and then I remembered it was after February. Closed season for pheasants." But not for husbands, I thought, but didn't say, as Jennifer went on, "I must have forgotten to put the safety catch on again. I walked on a little."

"Down the track in the wood?" I had another bundle of photographs in my brief, not of the mortuary but of rural scenes.

"Yes."

"And then?"

She paused, seemed to be in some difficulty, and looked to the young solicitor for help. "I've told Jeremy," she said.

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"Tell me."

Her hesitation didn't last long. She took in a deep breath and said, "I saw Jonno coming toward me."

"He was still angry?"

"No, I don't think so. He looked perfectly calm, actually."

"And you?"

"Oh, I was calm enough. I walked toward him. The track was rough, you know. Brambles. It needed clearing. And I must have tripped and—well, that's how it happened."

I looked at her in silence and then slapped my pockets. "You don't have a small cigar about you?"

"No." She was smiling and seemed relieved.

"Stupid of me. I must have left them in the car." I turned to Jeremy Jowling. "Your dog's probably guarding them with her fangs bared."

"I'll whizz out and get them. Back in a jiff."

Jeremy went obediently. I sat looking at Jennifer. "He's one of your lot, isn't he?" I asked her when we were alone.

"Jeremy? Well, we knew his father, of course," Jennifer answered vaguely.

"One of your lot." I stood and spoke my mind to her. "But I'm not. I don't wear green welly boots. I don't travel with a firearm and a bloody great mastiff in the back of my car. I'm even unfamiliar with your language—which seems to me to have been designed for the express purpose of saying nothing at all. I have landed in your midst, Mrs. Postern, like a creature from outer space. You can speak to me as to a perfect stranger."

"What do you want me to say?" She was smiling up at me with maddening politeness.

"Anything you think I ought to know."

There was a pause. She continued to smile and then said, as she had always done, "It was an accident."

The Postern house was a long grey Georgian manor in a small park which was bounded by the woods. The rough track I had seen in the photograph started at the edge of the parkland and passed the hedge, which surrounded a small tumbledown cottage. That afternoon I stood on the track near to a fallen tree, holding a shotgun in my hands. The weapon was the property of my instructing solicitor and I held it as though I were about to shoot a startled and unwary pheasant. Then I stumbled on the rough and overgrown ground and brought the gun up to point to Jeremy Jowling's chest, roughly the

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area in which Jonathan Postern had received the fatal charge of shot.

"I suppose it's possible," I speculated. "More likely I'd've shot your feet off, though."

Jeremy took the gun from me gently.

"Never, never let your gun

"Pointed be at anyone.

"That it should unloaded be

"Matters not the least to me."

"Come again?"

"You don't know that?" He sounded incredulous.

"No. We must have learnt different nursery rhymes." Then an uncomfortable thought struck me. "Jennifer Postern would've known it, though, wouldn't she? She must have learnt gun training on her Nanny's knee." I was looking moodily at the ground—the trees and the bushes, the track that ran through the wood.

"Her father was a terrific shot. Runs in the family. What are you looking at?"

"The scene of the crime," I told him. "The *locus* in *quo*."

"What do you do now?" Jeremy was interested to know. "Crawl about on your hands and knees collecting bits of cigarette ash in an old envelope?"

"Not exactly. The *locus* in *quo* looks just like any old bit of the English countryside to me."

I moved a little way along the track to a sign on a post, which bore the direction TO BADGER'S WOOD, and a picture of the appropriate animal.

"Where's that lead to?" I asked. "More Postern country?"

"Fishbourne country, actually."

"Who?"

"Maurice Fishbourne. Something of a weed, with a good deal of money. Gets ragged a lot for trying to ride at point-to-points. Invariably hits the deck."

"Fishface!" Yes, of course I remembered.

"You know him?"

"Hardly at all. He isn't a friend of the Posterns?"

"They can't stand him. No one can, actually. He's not P.L.U. exactly."

"People Like Us?" I hazarded a guess.

"Well, he puts up those poncy little signs on his land and gets all his cash from laxatives: 'Fisbourne's keep you regular.' "

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I was looking at the top windows of the cottage which were visible above the tangled hedge. "I rely on medicinal claret myself," I told him. And then I was startled by a raucous cry coming from somewhere quite near us. It was a strangely sad sound, like the lament for some irreparable loss. "What the hell's that?" I asked Jeremy. "Someone in pain?"

"Not at all. That is a yell of pure randiness. Look, I'll show you." He led me to a gap in the hedge and a gate into the untended cottage garden. And there, on the grass, was a rough coop in which a plump brown bird with a beady eye was imprisoned and letting people know about it. "That's a calling bird. A cock pheasant," Jeremy told me.

"A calling pheasant in a cage

"Puts all Heaven in a rage," I suggested, and went on,

"The wanton boy that kills the fly

"Shall feel the spider's enmity."

"Figgis, the old devil who lives here, keeps it to entice all the Postern pheasants into his front garden. Of course, when they get there he knocks them off from his front window with a shotgun. Cunning isn't it?"

"Did Jonathan Postern know he was being robbed?"

"I suppose he just let it go on. He couldn't get Figgis out of the cottage. Old Jonno was a bit of an innocent in spite of everything."

I was looking at the cottage. A thin line of smoke was coming out of the chimney. "Did you say Figgis?"

"I bet he's in there. Want to talk to him?"

"Talk to a prosecution witness?" I looked at Jeremy with deep disapproval. "Not sporting, old fellow. Definitely not sporting."

But as we moved away, I saw a shape behind the blurred glass of a downstairs window. The prosecution witness was no doubt watching us with interest.

When I got to know the Tester Arms Hotel I realized how right Jeremy Jowling had been to take me straight to the prison. That evening I had what was known as the "set meal"—Pâte Maison in the form of liver ice-cream, a steak from the rump of some elderly animal lightly singed under the X-ray machine, a cheeseboard aptly named because the Cheddar tasted exactly like wood, and a bottle of chilled claret which made Pommeroy's plonk seem like Château-Lafite.

I didn't sleep well that night. It wasn't just the firewood in the mattress, or the intense cold, or the noise in the water pipes like a

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giant's indigestion. I had sat up until well after midnight reading the post-mortem report of a certain Dr. Overton, a local man no doubt and hitherto unknown to me, and looking again and again at the photographs of the wound. Thoughts about shotguns raced through my head all night, and in the dawn I ordered the cooked breakfast, which was there in about an hour's time—cold as charity but better than dinner. At exactly nine o'clock, I put through a call to the Forensic Department at St. Cuthbert's Hospital in London and asked to speak to Professor Andrew Ackerman.

There are two people in England who know most of what there is to know about bloodstains: Horace Rumpole and Professor Andrew Ackerman. I have crossed swords with the good prof across many a courtroom, one of the most recent occasions being in the case of a strange young man who fell in with an appalling religious sect. It was a case which turned on a nice point of blood, and I think I got one up on Ackerman on that occasion.* We are firm friends, however, and once a year Andrew Ackerman invites me to lunch at the Athenaeum, where we discuss various corpses of our acquaintance over a chop. My night thoughts on the Postern case had convinced me that what I now needed was a bit of help from the good professor. By good fortune, I got hold of him before he went down to the morgue, and the conversation we had about shotgun wounds was long and enthralling.

In due course, young Jeremy Jowling came up to my room to fetch me for the *corrida,* and as I buttoned myself into the black jacket and waistcoat I asked him if he'd read Dr. Overton's report.

"I've glanced at it," Jeremy said.

I was tying up my brief. "Sure of himself, our Dr. Overton. Perhaps a little too sure of himself for an *experienced* pathologist. Know anything about him?"

"Never heard of him. Gravely usually does all the stiffs for the Home Office."

"How interesting!" I was checking the robes and fitting the thick bundle of papers into my briefcase.

"What're our chances?" Jeremy Jowling asked with a small show of nerves.

"Speaking as a sporting man—you'd like to know the odds?"

"Any better than evens?"

"It's not exactly an easy defense," I admitted. "But she's a woman.

*See *Rumpole's Return,* Penguin Books, 1980.

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She was probably badly treated by her husband. All we need is a sympathetic judge."

And then young Jeremy Jowling dropped his bombshell. "We've got a fellow called Mr. Justice Twyburne," he said, as though he were referring to the state of the weather. I must confess that the Rumpole jaw dropped.

"What do you think?" He must have noticed my dismay.

"I think—the odds have lengthened considerably."

"Why? What's he like then?"

I sat down, recovered my breath, lit a small cigar to steady my nerves, and asked young Jowling if he remembered Martin Muschamp.

"No—"

"One of the last death-penalty cases. He went out with a gang and was tried for shooting a copper. Twyburne summed up dead against him. Couple of years later another boy confessed and Marty Muschamp was cleared by a Home Office Inquiry."

"That was all right then," Jeremy suggested.

"Oh, lovely for everyone. Except for Martin Muschamp. He'd already been hanged." I got up and went to the door. "Don't worry too much. We don't do that sort of thing any more."

Mervyn Harmsway was a pleasant, middle-aged prosecutor, who, so I was told, had a pretty Queen Anne house in Tester, and an impressive collection of Crown Derby. He opened the case perfectly fairly in the chilly atmosphere of Twyburne's Court, and the old judge, more paper-colored than ever, listened without expression.

The Court was full. I recognized a few faces, including the pretty girls who had kissed Jonno at the point-to-point. Fiona was in mufti on the bench behind me, and her sister smiled at her, apparently unworried, from the dock. The solid-looking county jury listened to Harmsway as though they were determined not to let anyone know what they were thinking.

"That is all I have to say in opening this sad case, members of the jury," Harmsway finished. "And now, with the assistance of my learned friend, Mr. Gavin Pinker, I hope to fairly put the evidence before you."

"You are causing me a great deal of pain, Mr. Harmsway." A dry voice came from the Bench.

"I'm sorry, my Lord?" Harmsway looked puzzled.

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"Please. Don't split them." The judge was looking extremely pained.

"Don't split what, my Lord?"

"Your infinitives!" his Lordship cracked back. "This is a distressing case, in all conscience. Do we have to add to the disagreeable nature of the proceedings the sound of you tormenting the English language? You hope to put the evidence fairly."

"Yes, my Lord." Harmsway looked cowed.

"Then why don't you start to do it?" Twyburne asked testily.

"My learned friend, Mr. Pinker, will call the first witness."

Poor old Harmsway subsided, deflated, to his seat. His junior, Gavin Pinker, who seemed made of sterner stuff, rose and announced that he would now call Mrs. Marian Hempe. As the Posterns' dear old housekeeper waddled into the witness-box and took the oath, Harmsway whispered to me bitterly, "What a charming judge!"

"Don't worry, old darling," I comforted him. "Twyburne's quite impartial. He'll be just as ghastly to me." And then I turned my attention to the dialogue between Mrs. Hempe and Mr. Gavin Pinker.

"Mrs. Hempe. How long have you worked for the Posterns?" Pinker started quietly.

"Ten years now, for Master Jonathan. And his father before him."

"You don't live in?"

"I comes on my bicycle. They drive me home if it's a late dinner."

"On the afternoon that Jonathan Postern died—did you hear anything going on between him and his wife?"

"Yes. They was quarreling, like. In the sitting room. I could hear voices."

"Whose voices?"

"Both, I reckon."

"Could you hear any words?"

"I hear two words."

"What were they?"

" 'Kill you'—I heard that said. Loud. By her."

"By Mrs. Postern." Pinker paused to let the evidence sink in. "And after that?"

"Then I see Mr. Postern go out. He walked toward the woods."

"What happened then?"

"Mrs. Postern stayed indoors. Then *she* went out."

"How long did she stay out?"

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"I don't rightly know. Ten minutes—quarter of an hour, perhaps. Then she came back and got it."

"Got what?"

Mrs. Hempe pursed her lips as though about to have to mention some indelicacy, looked at the jury, and said, "Her shotgun."

"Did you see her get it?" Pinker asked.

"No. But I see her go out with it under her arm. She went back toward the woods again."

"That is the direction Mr. Postern had taken?"

"Yes."

"What happened next? Just tell the jury."

"I heard a shot from the wood," Mrs. Hempe just told the jury.

"From the way they'd both gone."

"Yes."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hempe."

Gavin Pinker consulted Harmsway, who took the view that Mrs. Hempe had done all that could be expected of her to scupper the defense, and I rose to cross-examine. I knew I would get nowhere at all by calling Mrs. Hempe a liar, so I began to investigate the points that interested me, hoping to get the cooperation of the good Mrs. Hempe.

"You heard *one* shot?" I asked her.

"No. I heard others."

"You heard others. When?"

"I heard some shooting from the wood. That was before Mrs. Postern went out."

"But after *Mr.* Postern went out?"

"Yes."

"After *Mrs.* Postern went out, how many shots did you hear?"

"Just one."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I'll take my Bible oath to it." Mrs. Hempe sounded nettled.

"Just *one* shot and that is all?"

"It was enough, wasn't it?"

The jury nodded in sympathy with the witness. I hurried on to another topic. "Now, you heard these words, 'Kill you.' You've sworn that was all you heard her say?"

"That's right."

I took my courage in my hands and launched an extremely dangerous question. "You didn't hear her say, *'I'll* kill you,' for instance?"

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I suggested, and held my breath until the witness gave me a hesitant and reluctant, "No."

"So she might possibly have been warning him that someone else might kill him?"

"I suppose so." Mrs. Hempe sounded extremely grudging. "But she was the only one there, wasn't she?"

"Exactly." Twyburne was no longer able to restrain himself. "Are you suggesting that someone else might have killed him, Mr. Rumpole?"

"My Lord, I was merely exploring the possibilities." I gave the old darling my most charming smile and sat down.

Sometime during that morning I glanced up at the public gallery and saw the face of Maurice Fishbourne staring down at me through a new pair of spectacles. Mr. Figgis from the cottage in the woods near the Postern house was in the witness-box. He was a grizzled, stooping man in his late sixties, I judged, wearing an old torn tweed jacket. He was imperfectly shaved, and his shirt looked as though it hadn't been washed for some time. He was an old man who lived alone. Harmsway took him through his evidence-in-chief and then I rose to cross-examine.

"When did you first see Mrs. Postern on that day?"

"When she was holding the shotgun. Standing about ten yards off him." Figgis was only too anxious to repeat his evidence.

"Eventually you took the gun off her and broke it open?"

"I did, yes."

"How many cartridges had been fired?"

"Just the one." Figgis seemed to think the evidence damning, but I blessed him silently for it.

"Just the one," I repeated for the jury. "You ejected the spent cartridge?"

"Yes."

"And did you go with her back to the house, where she telephoned the police?"

"I did." The old man seemed proud of the important part he played in these stirring events.

"And was her gun in your possession until the police arrived?"

"Yes."

"I'm much obliged." I gave the jury another look. "Now, when you first saw Mrs. Postern, what did she say, *exactly?*"

She said, *'I* did it. It was an accident.' "

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"She said, *'I* did it.' Might it not have been, *'I did* it'?"

"Is there a dispute as to what your client said, Mr. Rumpole?" Twyburne was irritated at what he clearly thought was a quibble.

"No dispute as to what she said, my Lord. I am only interested to discover where the emphasis was put."

"*You* may be interested in that, Mr. Rumpole. It remains to be seen in the fullness of time whether the point interests the jury." Twyburne looked at the jury and sighed heavily. The solid citizens continued to give nothing away.

"It may be a question of some importance, my Lord."

"The words are there." And then Twyburne delivered himself into my hands. "How they were said seems to be a matter of unimportant insignificance," he said weightily.

"May I suggest that it might be better to say, 'of insignificance,' my Lord." I was extremely polite.

"What?" The judge looked as puzzled as Harmsway had been on a similar occasion.

" 'Unimportant insignificance' might be a bit of a tautology, might it not? Something of a torment to the English language," I suggested innocently. The barristers in Court seemed too stunned to laugh. There was a moment's appalled silence when it seemed that the judge might be prepared to commit me for Contempt of Court. Then he said quietly, "Ask your question, Mr. Rumpole."

"Thanks awfully." Harmsway gave me a whisper of gratitude, and I whispered back, "Don't mention it." Then I asked Figgis again if he could remember how Jennifer Postern had emphasized the words of her admission.

"She said, *'I* did it,' " he decided after a good deal of thought.

"Now I wonder why she said that," I speculated. "There was no one *else* about who could have done it, was there?"

"Not as I could see."

"Not that you could see." I gave the jury time to think about that answer and then attacked another subject.

"Mr. Figgis. Do you keep a calling pheasant?"

"I don't know what you mean," he protested.

"Oh, I think you do. A cock bird in a cage whose cries invite numerous lady pheasants to visit your front garden when you knock them off from your downstairs window. So far as I can gather, you must have pheasant for breakfast, dinner, and tea."

That got a small laugh from the jury. Figgis smiled modestly. "Maybe I does a bit of that," he admitted.

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"Mr. Rumpole. This witness is not on trial for poaching." Twyburne was getting edgy. "Has this evidence the slightest relevance to this case?"

"No doubt the jury will tell us that, my Lord. In the fullness of time." I turned back to the witness before the judge could get at me again. "On the day you have been telling us about—"

"The day I see Mr. Postern dead?"

"That's it. What had you been doing that afternoon?"

"I was in my cottage."

"And as usual you were doing a bit of shooting, were you?"

"I may have been—" His answer was extremely reluctant.

"And your cottage is not more than fifteen yards from the scene of this alleged crime?"

"Mr. Rumpole!" The judge came to Figgis's rescue. "May I remind you that your client admitted shooting her husband with a shotgun, and shotgun wounds and pellets were found in her husband's body?"

"Your Lordship may remind me of that, but I can assure you I haven't forgotten it. Thank you, Mr. Figgis." I smiled politely at the judge, the witness, the jury, and anyone else I could think of and sat down. Harmsway announced that he had no further questions for the witness.

"Very well." Mr. Justice Twyburne looked at the clock and gave a small, wintry smile at the jury. "Members of the jury. This may be a convenient moment for you to obtain some refreshment. Be back at ten past two, please."

So the judge rose. As I was about to leave, Fiona came up to me and asked if I was coming down to see "Sprod."

"I don't think so," I told her. "Not till she's ready to tell me what happened."

At which moment the judge's clerk came up to me and said he had a message from his master.

"Am I under arrest?"

"On the contrary, sir. You're invited to lunch in the lodgings."

"This case is full of surprises."

"The car's outside. We travel in robes, sir."

On my way out to the judge's Rolls, I saw Maurice Fishbourne. He was standing on the pavement outside the Court, and he seemed about to speak to me, but then he changed his mind and turned away.

The invitation to take lunch in the Judges' "lodgings," referred

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to above, may require some explanation for those not deeply versed in legal matters. In the olden days, judges, barristers, and their respective clerks and hangers-on used to roll up in large coaches on circuit from one Assize town to the other, emptying the jails and usually dispatching their inhabitants to some further proceedings beyond the grave. Each town had to provide fitting accommodation for the judges' regular visits. A house was set aside, provided with silver, decanters, wine, and servants, bed linen and firewood and all appropriate comforts by the municipality, and was known as the Judges' lodgings.

Although the same enlightened planner (his name now escapes me) who abolished the greater part of the railways also cut out the circuit system—as though it were a rather slow branch line from Ashby de la Zouch—Red Judges, Judges of the Queen's Bench, still go on tour and sit to try criminal cases in provincial centers, and once there become prisoners in their own lodgings. They are waited on by elderly retainers, they have no worries about queuing at Tesco's, and they find it difficult to go to the pictures without a police escort. I have often wondered what would induce anyone to sentence themselves to such long terms of confinement.

The lodgings, of course, are usually large and pleasant old houses, and the one at Tester was no exception. It was of a warm red brick, much decorated by honeysuckle and clematis and surrounded by a carefully manicured lawn. We had traveled there with a couple of policemen on motorbikes as outriders and I resisted a strong temptation to wave in a royal fashion to a little crowd of women at a bus stop. We left our wigs on the hall table, where they lay like dead and dirty white birds while we ate in our robes. Twyburne sat at the head of the table, Rumpole for the defense on his right, and Harmsway and Pinker on his left. The lunch, which was plain but excellent, passed without any particular embarrassment, except that Twyburne ignored me and addressed all his remarks to the prosecution team. As the butler served coffee and put the decanter of port on the table, Twyburne was finishing a well used anecdote.

" 'He sat beside me in the cinema, sir,' said the girl in the indecency case, 'and put his hand up my skirt.' 'Very well,' said the old Recorder, with his eye on the clock at lunchtime, 'I suggest we leave it there until five past two.' "

Twyburne's shoulders heaved and he laughed soundlessly at this. Pinker and Harmsway burst into almost uncontrollable mirth, and the judge pushed the decanter in their direction. I was not laughing,

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and perhaps it was because he felt some sort of a challenge that the judge turned to me for the first time.

"Well, now. No more arguments about grammar this afternoon, eh, Rumpole?" he said.

"Possibly not." I was making no promises.

"All the same, you stood up to me pretty well." Twyburne was smiling in a patronizing sort of way. "That's what we need in our job. Guts and determination to stick to an argument."

"Even if it's wrong?" I asked him.

"Mistakes can usually be put right." He took an apple from a dish in front of him and began to peel it slowly and with great accuracy. Still angry at being ignored over the last half hour, I said, "I suppose not in the death-penalty days."

"Oh, you're thinking of the young fellow who went out on the robbery. Case where they shot a policeman?" Twyburne spoke vaguely, as though it were a minor matter that had happened a long time ago.

"Martin Muschamp," I reminded him firmly.

"Muschamp. Yes. Nothing else I could have done about that. I summed up the evidence—it was pretty damning, of course—and I left the matter to the jury." He had finished peeling the apple now and divided it into neat quarters.

"So it was just the luck of the draw, really?" I asked him.

"All this argument about the death penalty. We managed to take it in our stride. Did our duty. We didn't enjoy it, of course. Lot of nonsense talked about judges eating muffins after death sentences. Well, you couldn't get muffins in the Army and Navy Club." He looked at me and seemed to be waiting for a comment, or an apology. I didn't oblige him. "All you could do was sum up and leave the matter to the jury." There was a new note in his voice now. It was no longer the voice of a judge, but of an advocate, pleading for something. At last he said, "Nothing else I could do, was there?"

I had a sudden feeling that Mr. Justice Twyburne wanted to be forgiven, but who was I to forgive him? The only answer I had was, "I don't know."

A long silence followed—and ended when Twyburne popped a quarter of the apple into his mouth, chewed it, and asked, "Are you a gardener, Rumpole?"

"I'm afraid not." I was no use to him.

"Excuse me, Judge, where—?" Harmsway asked, and when the

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Judge told him it was on the right just outside the door, he left, followed by his learned junior.

"I'm a rose man myself," the judge told me when we were left alone. "Of course, it's been difficult to get round all the pruning since my wife died. Come and look at this." Twyburne got up and went to the sideboard. I knew now, without a doubt, that he wanted me to feel pity for him. He took a silver-framed photograph off the long stretch of mahogany. I was looking at two little girls in the garden.

"The Mrs. Sam Macreadys are flowering well, don't you think? And that's two of the grandchildren. I've got six now, altogether. This one's the budding show-jumper."

He put the photograph down slowly and looked at me. He seemed very tired and enormously old. "I think I summed up Muschamp quite fairly," he said.

"Didn't you tell the jury they might well not believe a word of his evidence?" I wasn't letting him off.

"That was my personal opinion. They were quite free to come to their own conclusion, wouldn't you agree?"

I said nothing. I didn't want to give him what he wanted from me, not even a crumb of comfort. We stood facing each other in silence for a moment, and then Harmsway came back from the lavatory.

"So kind of you, Judge," he said. "Such an agreeable luncheon."

When we had made our royal progress back to Court, I cross-examined Detective Inspector Clover, the comfortable, rubicund local officer in charge of the case. I took hold of Exhibit One, which was Jennifer Postern's shotgun, and held it up for his inspection. I put my questions gently. I was saving all my strength for the coming battle with Dr. Overton, the pathologist.

"This was the gun that fired the shot. You're satisfied of that, Inspector?"

"Quite satisfied, sir."

"It was, of course, immediately submitted to the ballistics expert, Mr. Collinson, whose evidence has been read. You know his view is that only one barrel had been fired within the hours before he saw it?"

"Yes."

"And you found one cartridge case and one only at the scene of the crime?"

"Yes."

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"So your view of this case, after the most thorough inquiries by the police, is that Mrs. Postern fired one shot at her husband and one shot only?"

The good Inspector turned to the judge and gave me what I wanted. "That is absolutely clear, my Lord," he said.

"Absolutely clear." I looked at the jury, willing them to remember what he'd said, and then I let the Inspector go.

Dr. Overton was young and extremely pleased with himself. He stood in the witness-box, with his reports and the mortuary photographs spread out in front of him, and lectured us as though we were a collection of housewives taking a course in elementary pathology on the University of the Air. He smiled at the jury after every answer and, when addressed by the judge, he bowed like an over-eager hall porter working his way up to a generous tip. He wore a neat blue suit, his hair came over the tops of his ears, and he sported a small moustache. As Harmsway took him through his evidence, I stirred in my seat restlessly. I couldn't wait for my turn to cross-examine.

"Dr. Overton, have you investigated previous cases of death by shotgun wounds?" I began, when my opportunity came at last.

"I think one." He smiled modestly at the jury.

"Just one. And have you been called on to give evidence in a murder trial before?"

"Well, no. Not, actually—"

"Congratulations on your debut." I gave him a smile for which he wasn't grateful. "Why was it that you were called in to perform the post mortem in this most important case? Is not Dr. Gravely the most experienced and aptly named Home Office pathologist for the Tester district?"

"Dr. Gravely was away at a conference in Scarborough. I was called in at short notice."

"And saw your big chance?"

"His big chance of *what,* Mr. Rumpole?" Twyburne didn't like my tone with the young doctor.

"Perhaps your big chance of ingratiating yourself with the local police by agreeing with their conclusions?" I suggested.

"I did agree with their conclusions, yes."

"And with their view that Jonathan Postern's body had received the impact of one, and only one, shotgun wound."

"That was my conclusion." The doctor gave the judge another small bow, and Twyburne gave him a shadowy smile of approval.

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"From which we may draw the inference that it was the shot from Mrs. Postern's gun which caused his death, either deliberately, or by accident?"

"Yes." Dr. Overton felt it was quite safe to agree.

"Shotgun pellets enter the body at one central point surrounded by an area of scatter?"

"That's true."

"And the area of scatter is larger if the gun has been fired from a greater distance." Elementary, of course, but I wanted also to give the jury a lesson in first principles.

"I agree." Dr. Overton was clearly feeling that he was emerging from my cross-examination unscathed. I was doing my best to lure him into a false sense of security. "I'm glad you do. Take Photograph Three, if you will."

The witness, the judge, and the jury opened the volume of mortuary photographs.

"You have made a pencil circle round the entry hole which you consider fatal. It's the right side of the chest in the jury's photograph."

"I see that, yes."

"That is where you consider the fatal shot entered?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Absolutely positive?"

"I have no doubts whatever on the subject, Mr. Rumpole." For a moment I felt sorry for the young doctor—he was so sure of everything. I hardened my heart and said, "There is another, smaller wound to the left and a little above that, is there not? Perhaps you would like to borrow my glass?" I held out a magnifying glass, but the doctor scorned its assistance.

"No. I can see perfectly well, thank you."

"Is that the darker spot on the photograph? Just show us where you're looking." Twyburne was following carefully. Dr. Overton held up his photograph and then gave another little bow.

"Yes. At about two o'clock from the pencil circle, members of the jury," said the judge. The jury found it and some nodded.

"What did you take *that* to be?" I asked the witness.

"I took that to be part of the scatter," the doctor said very positively, hoping that would settle the matter. It didn't.

"Could it not be the central wound of a second shot, fired, perhaps, from some yards farther away?" I suggested. I was rewarded by a

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considerable pause, and when Dr. Overton spoke again it was with rather less confidence. "I suppose that's a possibility."

"It wasn't a minute ago, was it, Dr. Overton?"

"*Just* a possibility, my Lord," the witness appealed to the judge, but got no help.

"So when you told us you were absolutely certain there was only one shot, you were giving this jury an opinion which was not entirely reliable." I saw the jury looking fairly sternly at the witness.

"I see no reason to suppose that there was more than one shot." Dr. Overton tried a retreat to his previously held position.

"But it's a *possibility!*"

"Yes," he had to admit.

"What would turn that possibility into a probability, Dr. Overton?"

"Well, I suppose if there was some strong additional evidence." He made a concession which he clearly believed was safe.

"And you say there is *none?*"

"Not so far as I know, my Lord." Another small bow to the judge was received in sepulchral silence by Twyburne.

"What this jury has to consider, Dr. Overton, is the extent of your knowledge. How many pellets, on an average, are there in a twenty-bore shotgun cartridge?" I had the satisfying feeling that I had fired him a question he wasn't prepared for. The doctor frowned, and answered with extreme care, "I would say—about an ounce of shot."

"Well done. Very promising." Now I was being the teacher. "And so how many pellets are there in an ounce of shot?"

"How many pellets?" he frowned.

"Are you hard of hearing, Dr. Overton?"

"Not in the least."

"Then could you force yourself to tell this jury the answer to my question?"

"I think, my Lord," he said with a small bow of apology now, "I would have to look that up."

It was time for a bit of carefully controlled indignation, and I said, "It didn't occur to you to look it up before you came here to give so-called expert evidence against a lady of unblemished character on a charge of murder?"

"No," was the only answer possible.

"Then let us see if you remember this. When you carried out your post-mortem examination, you found a large number of shotgun pellets in the body, did you not?"

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"A very large number indeed." He seemed pleased by the fact; so was I.

"I'm obliged. Did you count them?"

"May I look at my notes?" But Dr. Overton was now looking at Inspector Clover, sitting in the well of the Court, for help.

"Look at anything you like," I said, "except the Inspector in charge of the case. He's not going to be able to help, you know."

"Mr. Rumpole!" I heard a dry voice from the Bench and apologized at once, of course. "Your Lordship objected to that observation? Then I will withdraw it and we can get on with something more interesting. How many pellets did you find in the deceased's body, Dr. Overton?"

"About four hundred and eighty, my Lord," he said, and the judge made a careful note.

"And there may have been others you didn't find?"

"There may well have been."

"Now, let me tell you something, Doctor, which may be a help to you if you ever come to give evidence in a murder trial again. Your average cartridge for a twenty-bore shotgun contains two hundred and fifty pellets."

"Well, I must accept that, of course." The doctor couldn't very well do anything else. It was all in Ackerman.

"So does not the presence in the deceased's body of almost double that number of pellets indicate to you that there were probably two shots?"

The silence seemed endless. The judge sat with his pencil poised over his notebook. In the dock Jennifer Postern looked as though the answer concerned her not at all. Then Dr. Overton said, "It might do so—"

"Might it not?" I came down on the answer quickly. "And if Mrs. Postern only fired one shot, might not some *other* person have fired the other?"

"Surely that is a conclusion for the jury, Mr. Rumpole," Twyburne suggested, but this time it was not a rebuke.

"My Lord, it will be my submission that it is the *only* conclusion. Thank you, Dr. Overton." I started to sit down, then changed my mind. "Oh, Doctor, before you go—" Dr. Overton was leaving the witness-box with considerable relief. He paused disconcertedly as I held up the small volume which had been my inspiration for the day. "If you intend to continue in your present line of work, I would recommend a study by Professor Andrew Ackerman on *Gunshot*

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Wounds in Forensic Medicine. Such a useful little volume, and quite easy reading for the beginner."

"Of course, that cross-examination was wonderful entertainment, Rumpole." Miss Allways had come up to me after the judge left Court and I was packing up my brief for another evening of quiet contemplation.

"One of my best, Fiona," I said with becoming modesty. "Perhaps my very best of a medical witness. Luckily, I couldn't warm to Dr. Overton."

"But where does it get my sister?" Fiona asked.

"Just possibly, off."

She frowned, as though she couldn't see it personally. "Sprod says it was an accident. Are you suggesting that there were two accidents?"

"No, Fiona. Only one accident."

"What are you getting at?"

"Your sister's not too keen on the truth coming out in this case, is she, Fiona? Tell her I'll be down to the cells to see her first thing tomorrow morning."

"Why not tonight?"

"Not tonight. No. I'm going back to the Tester Arms. I've got to see somebody else first."

I had seen Fishbourne hanging about in the back of the Court when I was talking to Fiona, which is why I had announced my evening's plans in as loud a voice as possible. But when I turned away from her, he had gone and I couldn't find him in the corridor or waiting for me outside the building. So I went back to the hotel, had a bath to wash away the courtroom atmosphere, and changed into an old pair of grey flannels and a tweed jacket that had seen better days. No one rang to say that I had a visitor and, as I struggled through the appalling grapefruit segments, battery hen, and frozen veg, no one came up to my table.

Only as I sat in the residents' lounge, with a bottle of less than average claret and a small cigar, was my patience rewarded. He was coming toward me through a maze of deserted coffee tables.

"Thank you for coming, Mr. Fishbourne," I said. "Do please sit down."

He sat, refused a drink, and looked at me as though desperate for good news. "Y-Y-you can't get her off, can you?" he said.

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"Suppose you tell me the answer to that, Mr. Fishbourne."

"I mean, I d-don't see how you can. She said she did it."

"What she said was, 'I did it,' " I reminded him. "Who else did she think might have done it, do you suppose?"

He looked at me then, I was glad to see, with considerable surprise. My suggestion, it seemed, was one that hadn't occurred to him before.

"It couldn't possibly've been me." He spoke quite calmly, without indignation or protest.

"*Couldn't?*"

"I d-didn't see him. I'd gone up to London. Quite unexpectedly. I had a call from our solicitors and I went up just after lunch. All sorts of people saw me."

I had no doubt they had, and felt a surge of relief. "That's what we call an alibi in the trade," I told him. "Our first bit of luck in this case. But you know why Postern came to see you, don't you? I mean, it wasn't to criticize your riding abilities."

"N-n-no. It wasn't for that." He was looking at me, deciding to trust me. Then he accepted a glass of wine and started to tell me the whole story.

"How did you guess?" Jennifer Postern asked me when we met early the next morning, in the cells under Tester Court. We had been given thick mugs of tea by the lady dock officer and I felt easier in my mind than I had since the trial began.

"I saw you when Fishface fell at the last fence," I told her. "I thought you were his wife. Then you laughed at him with the others, so I knew you were hiding something. I suppose Jonathan found out about you and Maurice Fishbourne."

"It's such a mess." For the first time, she lost her extraordinary composure. She bowed her head, her hands were over her face and her shoulders shaking. Then she made a great effort, looked up, and said, "What do you want me to do?"

"Why not try telling the truth? Sometimes people win cases like that. What do you say—shall we give it a try?"

So, when the Court assembled, I called Jennifer Postern into the witness-box, and she swore to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

"Mrs. Postern," I went straight to the heart of the case, "the afternoon your husband died you had a quarrel. What was that quarrel about?"

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"About Maurice Fishbourne."

Twyburne looked up at a new name; the jury were puzzled. I explained with a question, "He is your next-door neighbor?"

"Yes."

"What did you tell your husband?"

"I told Jonno that I loved Maurice and if he would divorce me we hoped to marry. I had been unhappy with my husband for a long time." Now she had made up her mind to tell her story, Jennifer spoke simply and convincingly.

"Had Jonathan Postern been violent to you?"

"Yes. Quite often."

"And so, on the afternoon you quarreled—?"

"Jonno said he'd go over and see Maurice and tell him never to see me again. He threatened to beat Maurice up. I knew Maurice could have a violent temper and that he hated Jonno. I think I shouted at my husband that if he went, Maurice might kill him."

"Was Mrs. Hempe in the house when you shouted that?"

"She was, yes."

"And might have heard part of it?"

"Yes. Easily."

"Had Maurice told you he might kill your husband?"

"When he heard how Jonno had treated me, yes."

"Did you take these threats seriously?"

"I knew that Maurice was a very determined man. He has a very strong will."

"Let's come to the time when your husband left the house."

"Jonno said he was going out to cool off, but after a while I thought he'd gone to Maurice's, so I decided to follow him. I got as far as the track by Figgis's cottage and I saw Jonathan. There was blood—" She paused, seemed unable to go on, and then controlled herself. "I saw that he was dead."

"What did you think?"

"Of course I thought that Maurice had done it." She looked at the jury. "It was just by Maurice's wood. I thought he'd met Jonathan there and they quarreled and—" For a moment her voice faded.

"And?"

"I knew Maurice wouldn't be able to get away with it." She was summoning up reserves of strength. "I thought he'd be convicted of murdering Jonathan. Oh, I was in a sort of panic, I suppose."

"So what did you decide to do?" I asked her very quietly.

The Court and the jury were totally silent, almost breathless with

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attention as Jennifer answered, "I decided to pretend I'd shot Jonathan. By mistake. In an accident. I went back to the house and got my shotgun. When I got to the wood again, Jonathan was still there. I put in one cartridge and I fired." Now she'd said it, the witness looked enormously relieved.

"One shot only?"

"Yes, only one."

"Into his dead body?"

Jennifer's answer was hardly above a whisper. "Yes."

In the course of time my task was done, and I sat listening to Mr. Justice Twyburne summing up to the jury. He spoke quietly: at times we had to strain our ears to hear him. With his lined face and thin neck emerging from a stiff collar that seemed too big for him, he looked like an aged tortoise. He was a lonely old judge who refused to retire and who had come to me, of all people, for reassurance. And then he looked at me, and I gave his words my full attention.

"Members of the jury," the judge was saying, "contrary to the views of *some people*, a British criminal trial cannot be compared in any way to a horserace." He turned back to the jury. "You do not get the result by closing your eyes and sticking a pin into the list of runners. If you are sure that, for whatever reason, Mrs. Postern deliberately shot at her husband with the intention of killing him or doing him serious harm, why then you must convict her. But if you think that the account she gave you might be true, I say *might* be true, then she is entitled to be acquitted. There is some support for Mrs. Postern's story, is there not, in the medical evidence?" Twyburne paused, searching for a place in his notebook. I was filled with amazement, as I slowly realized we were getting a fair, even a favorable summing up. I wondered for a moment if we had Martin Muschamp to thank for it. Then Twyburne went on to the jury, "You have to consider the possibility that, in an accident caused by the man Figgis shooting from the window of his cottage, Mr. Postern met his death on that woodland track. That Mrs. Postern, coming on the body, assumed her lover to have been responsible and took extraordinary steps to cover up what she thought had been a crime. This is not a Court of morals, members of the jury, and it is not a racetrack. What we are concerned with is certainty, and the truth."

Hilda had the television on as I let myself into Casa Rumpole at

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Froxbury Court. It was booming news from Tester Assizes, and telling a waiting world that Jennifer Postern had been acquitted.

"Well, Rumpole," said Hilda. "I suppose you think you've done something frightfully clever."

She was standing by the mantelpiece, on which she had put the photograph of a gentleman's lodge near Tester, cut carefully out of *Country Life*. Hilda was still hankering, quite clearly, for rural living and membership of the County set.

"No." I told her, "I think I've done something absolutely brill."

I went into the kitchen, opened a well earned bottle of Pommeroy's plonk, and brought my wife a brimming glassful. Then I raised my own beaker in a toast. "To Jennifer Postern," I said. "A wonderful woman in some ways. She took the most extraordinary risks to protect the man she loved."

"Fiona's sister?" Hilda was frowning.

"Yes. Doesn't look all that much like Fiona." I was staring at the cutting on the mantelpiece. "Far more beautiful, don't you think? Fine-looking woman. We'll be able to see a good deal of her if we take that gentleman's lodge arrangement near Tester you're always talking about. Jennifer promises to give me shooting lessons."

"Shooting lessons? *You*, Rumpole?" She was clearly worried.

"Oh, yes. We plan to spend a good deal of time together. You'll be kept busy, I suppose, bottling fruit."

Hilda went to the mantelpiece. She looked thoughtful.

"Rumpole. I've been thinking. It's really very convenient for us, this flat in the Gloucester Road."

"Yes, but—"

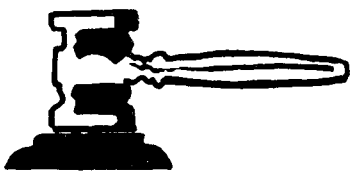
"We can always have days out in the country."

"I suppose that's true, but—"

"I think I've decided against Tester."

She Who Must Be Obeyed took the advertisement, crumpled it up, and threw it into the wastepaper basket.

"Well, Hilda," I said. "It's entirely your decision, but perhaps it'll be better for our health, living quietly in London."



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From Lorraine Collins

LAST-MINUTE FRUIT CAKE

"This is my mother's 'inexpensive fruit cake' recipe, but I call it 'last-minute' because it doesn't have to be made several days in advance to be moist and tasty, and when you do make it at the last minute the kitchen smells good, as it should at Christmas. It's somewhat like a bread instead of a cake, and has only raisins, dates, and nuts."

1½ cups large seeded raisins
1½ cups chopped dates
2 cups sugar
5 tbsp. shortening
3 cups flour
1 tsp. soda
2 tsp. cinnamon
1 tsp. cloves
1 tsp. salt
1 cup chopped nuts

Place raisins, dates, sugar, shortening, and 2 cups of boiling water in saucepan and simmer 20 minutes. Cool the mixture (it can stand overnight if you don't have time to make it all at once). Sift flour, soda, and spices together and stir into the cooled mixture. Add nuts last, coated with a little of the flour. Pour into well greased and floured loaf pans. Bake 1½ hours in moderate oven (325°F.). When cool, wrap in foil or wax paper. The fruit cakes stay moist and keep well.

From Eleanor Sullivan

MYSTERY TORTE

Crumble 16 Ritz crackers and ⅔ cup walnuts or pecans fine. Mix 3 egg whites with 1 cup sugar and ½ tsp. vanilla. Blend both and pour into an 8-inch pie tin. Bake at 350°F. for 30 minutes. Cool and top with whipped cream—and, optionally, shaved chocolate. Let stand for 3 hours before serving.

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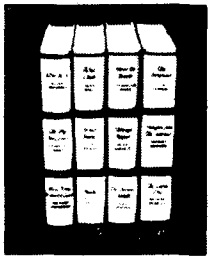

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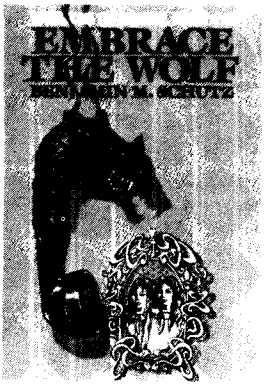

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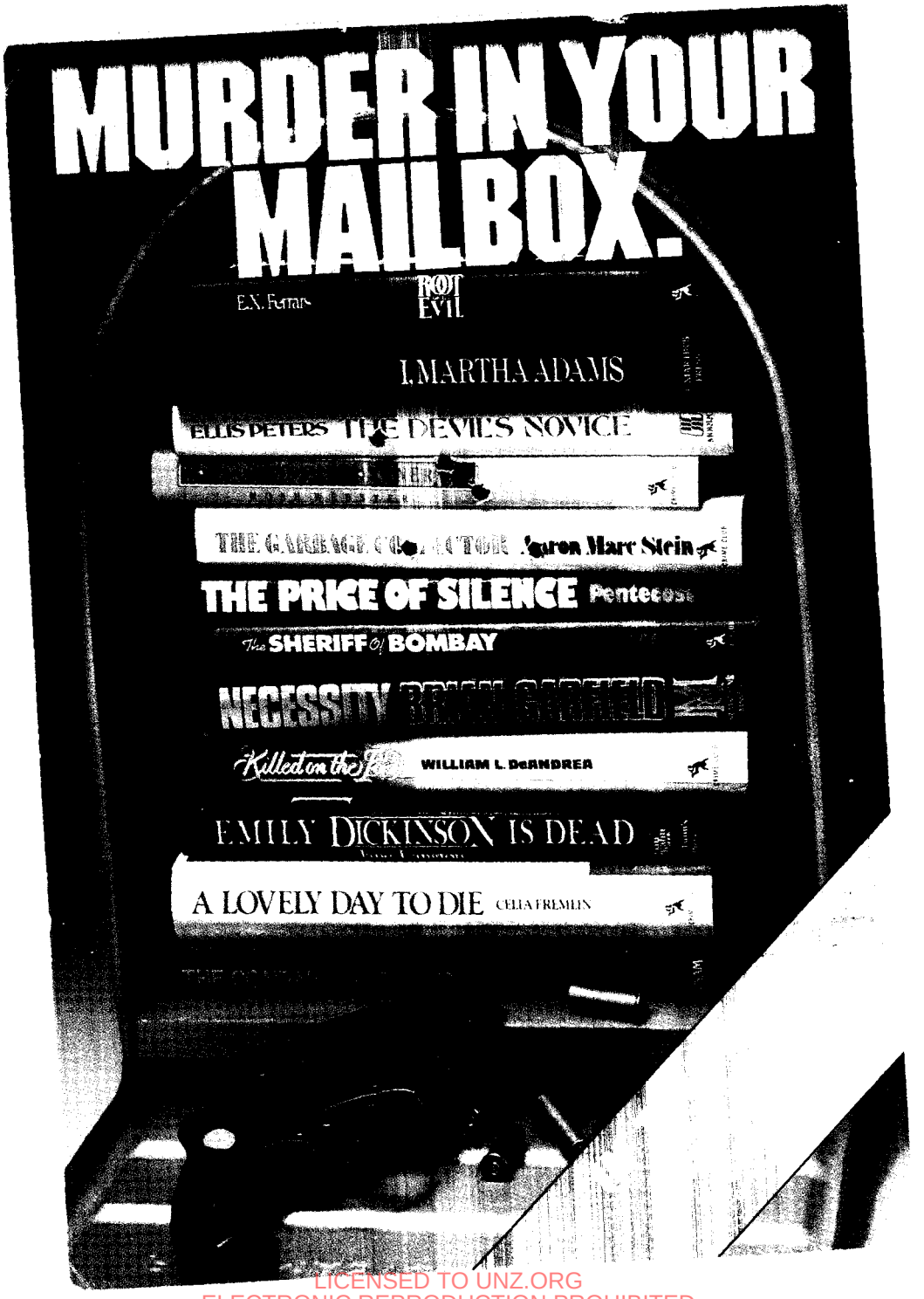

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